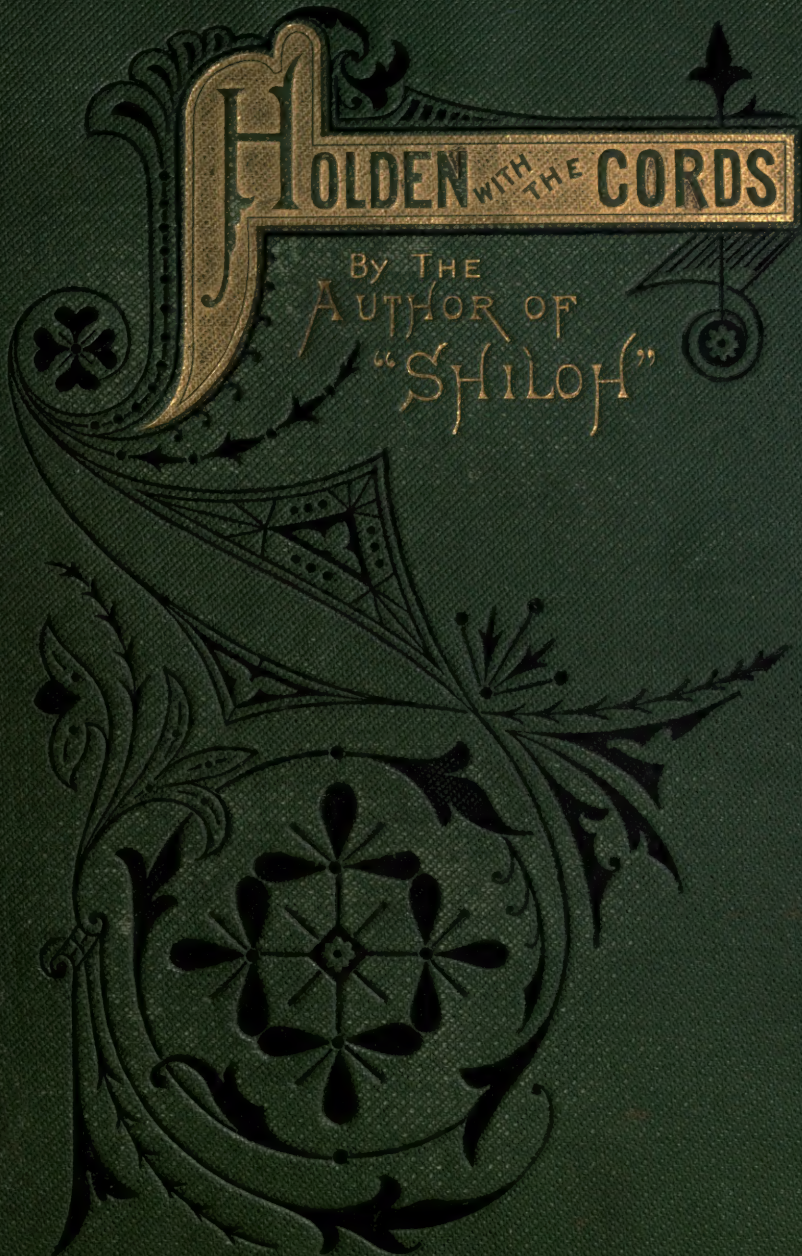


HOLDEN WITH THE CORDS

By THE
AUTHOR OF
"SHILOH"





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HOLDEN WITH THE CORDS

BY W. M. L. JAY

Author of "Shiloh," etc.

INV. 1898.

"Sin will pluck on sin."

King Richard III.

NEW YORK

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY, PUBLISHERS

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PREFACE.

IN sending forth another book belonging to the class known as religious novels, the author is moved to say a word to the critics who received a former one with so pleasant a mixture of praise and deprecation. As one of them frankly explained, "they like a pill none the better for being sugar-coated." It is not necessary to remind them that there may be younger (and possibly older) people who do. It is more to the point to state that persons to whom religion is a pill—a bitter, nauseous compound, to be bolted in sickness, and kept out of sight in health—are not the persons for whom the author writes.

There is another class of objectors. They talk solemnly of Art and its canons; they make a religion of it, having little other. One of these remarks, that "a tract in the hands of the Venus di Medici would be an impertinence." I quite agree with him. But why need he ignore the fact that the Venus is also the outcome of a religion? To the ancient sculptor, it was a goddess, not a woman, that grew under his hands; it was Devotion, working together with Genius, that produced the two or three statues which the world agrees to admire. So the few great poems of the world are religious poems. Why, then, should not the great novel of the world be a religious novel? Some day, be sure, a genius sweeter than Hawthorne's, more genial than Dickens', and subtler than

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Thackeray's, will arise to give it to us. Let me humbly help to prepare the way for him! Meanwhile, be it also understood that the persons to whom Art is a sufficing end, instead of a noble means, are not the persons for whom I write.

I *do* write for the "gentle reader" who enjoys religion in novels, as elsewhere. Be thus much said for his liking, even from the art side. There are two classes of novels—the descriptive and the analytical; one pictures real life, the other passions and motives. Religion has its rightful place in both, because it is an important part of real life, and controls both passions and motives. Finally (for the subject is much too wide for a preface), the modern novel being so potent a power,—for evil on the one hand, for social and civil reform on the other,—it is fair to suppose that it may do good service for religion.

In conclusion, I have to make two acknowledgments. The first to an unknown coadjutor, a hand that is doubtless mouldering into dust. Some years ago, a yellow, time-worn manuscript, purporting to be a veritable family history, fell into my hands. I am indebted to it for the main outline of my story. The second is to MISS FREEBORNE,—the only sculptor of our day, so far as I know, who has consecrated her genius to Christian Art. From her studio I have quietly abstracted the sculpture which lends its white grace to these pages. I should also have seized upon the slender figure of her St. Agnes, and the bowed head of her Martyr, had they been available to my purpose.

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HOLDEN WITH THE CORDS.

INTRODUCTION.

VERY beautiful was the long vista of the elm-arched street. So irresistibly did it woo the eye to linger among its gray columns and green arches, or wander adown its fair, temple-like perspective to the hazy vanishing point, that the wayfarer might easily forget to observe what sort of dwellings were ranged along its sides. Nor did they seek to force themselves upon his notice. They were all plain, substantial structures, with no obtrusive marks of ostentation or of meanness about them; and they all stood a little back from the street, leaving room for a trim grass-plot, or a thicket of flowering shrubs, between them and the passer-by. They would impress him, collectively, as genuine, well-to-do homes, free alike from the struggles of poverty and the temptations of wealth, without troubling him to recognize them individually, or diverting his gaze from the over-arching elms that were so much better worth his looking at.

Such, at least, would be the fact, until he came to a certain corner; where a large square structure of stuccoed brick, coming boldly forward to the pavement, and planting its heavy steps thereon, would be sure to arrest his glance, and, perhaps, faintly stir his curiosity. It was too large for a private building, and too unpretending for a public one,—what was it? If he had put the inquiry into

audible words, he would have been told that it was the Medical College. And if his interlocutor had chanced to be a white-haired, genial-faced old man, long ago flung aside from the stream of active life, and, consequently, with time on his hands for a little chat with a stranger,—he would, doubtless, have woven into his answer the popular witticism;—

“Everything here, sir, is arranged just as it should be. The divinity school is on the road to the poorhouse; the law-school adjoins the jail; and the medical college—this building before you, sir—is hard by the cemetery;—you can see the monuments rising above the hedge yonder.”

But the young man now coming up the street, through the pleasant play of sunshine and shadow beneath the elms, would neither have asked the question, nor smiled at the answer. He knew the stuccoed building well, as a three years' occupant thereof must needs do; and he had heard and repeated the witticism too many times to leave it the faintest sparkle. It was doubtful, too, whether he gave a thought to the loveliness of the elm-arched vista that stretched before him,—partly by reason of his familiarity therewith, partly on account of a preoccupied mind, and still more, perhaps, because his bright, brisk, energetic temperament was not of the sort which is quickest to feel the subtile charm, and recognize the delicate outline, of the spirit of beauty. He came on rapidly, with an elastic step and a cheery whistle, and, as he neared the college, he cast a quick glance at one of its upper windows. What he saw there would have been a pretty enough sight to most people, —merely a tiny brown bird hopping to and fro on the window-sill, and turning its small head briskly from side to side in its search for infinitesimal crumbs,—but it brought a shadow to his broad, frank brow.

“Not yet up,” he muttered, “or that wren wouldn't be trotting up and down there so complacently! To be sure, he may have gone out, but it isn't likely.”

Neither for the look nor the thought did he pause, but strode straight up two flights of stairs, his firm tread resounding loudly through the empty, uncarpeted halls, and knocked at the door of a front room. There was no response. He knocked again, with a somewhat impatient hand, tried the door and found it locked, waited a moment, beat a third emphatic rat-tat-too upon the panel, without eliciting other reply than a faint and dreary echo from the attic above; and, finally, turned on his heel, and walked down-stairs. At the head of the second flight, a thought seemed to strike him; after a moment of hesitation, he turned and knocked at a door close at hand. Scarcely waiting for the prompt "Come in!" he opened it, with the question,—“Have you seen Arling this morning?”

The occupant of the room was a broad-shouldered young man, sitting at a table covered with books and papers, and deeply absorbed in study. He only half turned his head, showing a regular, clear-cut profile, as he answered,—

“No. I left him so late last night that I overslept this morning, and have thought of nothing but making up lost time. And really, Trubie, a man might be excused for forgetting his best friend—if he had one—in examination week. But, is Arling any worse?”

“That’s what I should like to know, Roath,” returned Trubie, planting himself a little more firmly on the threshold, but taking no notice of the chair that the other had carelessly pushed toward him. “At any rate, he’s out.”

Roath started, and turned completely round, giving a view of a square-featured, somewhat moody, but still handsome, face. “Out!” he repeated, looking both amazed and startled.

“So it would seem. The door is locked, and I rapped and rattled loud enough to wake the dead.”

“Oh,” said Roath, with a prolonged falling inflection.

And after a moment's consideration, he turned back to his books, as if there were no more to be said.

Trubie lingered. Not, evidently, from any special liking for Roath's society, but because he was undecided what to do next. "I don't understand it, Roath," he said slowly. "You know Arling was to have kept his room to-day, by way of gaining strength, and guarding against a relapse. And we were to have gone over 'Barnes' together this morning, so as to be all primed for Professor Beers to-morrow. What *can* he have done with himself?"

"Perhaps," said Roath, absently, with his eyes on his book, "some of the others may have seen him."

Trubie took the hint—if such it was meant to be—and withdrew. He spent the next half hour in knocking at sundry doors, and repeating, with slight variation, the questions and remarks wherewith he had favored Roath. No one had seen Arling; no one knew anything about him. All seemed surprised to learn that he had gone out; but all were laboriously cramming for the examinations in progress, and the surprise made but a faint and transient ripple on the surface of their troubled minds. Trubie's persistency impressed them much more strongly; they wondered that he had leisure to bestow upon any anxiety not connected with those dreaded examinations, any fear save that of failing to secure the right to sign himself, "Frank Trubie, M.D."

Nor—to represent him fairly—was the young man himself wholly insensible of his absurdity. "Well!" said he, at last, "I can't afford to spend my morning in this way. I must go back to my room, and set to work. When Arling comes in, tell him I've been here." And away he went through the dancing elm-shadows, more quickly than he had come.

Two hours passed. Then Roath closed his books, gathered up his papers, and took his way to the examination

room, amid the groups of assembling students. Many eyes followed him, some with admiration, some with envy, —few or none, it was plain to see, with affection.

“No question but that he’ll pass!” said one. “He’s all brain,—I’d be content with half as much.”

“And his memory!” exclaimed another. “It appears to be constructed on the principle of a rat-trap; ingress is easy, egress—not provided for!”

“No one can keep step with him but Arling,” remarked a third; “if *he* gets well enough, there will be a close race between them.”

“I bet on Arling,” said a fourth,—a somewhat slender young man, with an easy, almost careless air, but a thoughtful face,—Mark Tracey by name.

“Eh! why?” asked the first speaker.

“Because, as you said just now, Roath is all brain. Whereas Arling, while he does not want for brain, has also a heart and a conscience. And in medicine, as in everything else, that wonderful trio are too strong for brain alone.”

“Moralizing, as usual,” returned the other with a light laugh.

“Not at all. It is plain common-sense. The history of the world shows it. Perhaps there is no better type of pure intellect than Satan. And Michael the archangel does very well for a representative of love, duty, and intellect, combined. You remember which beat?”

“It is not possible, Tracey, that you believe that fable!”

“Grant that it is a fable,” replied Tracey, lifting his eyebrows;—“it nevertheless stands for the concrete wisdom of the ages which preceded it.”

The last words were spoken on the threshold of the examination room, and, of necessity, closed the discussion.

Roath’s examination, on this day, did not disappoint the general expectation. Although somewhat paler than

ordinary, he was thoroughly self-possessed; his answers were clear and to the point; not once did his memory play him false; scarcely once did he hesitate for a word. He gave evidence not only of close study, but of careful analysis, and profound, sagacious thought. But he looked worn when it was over, as if the mental strain had been severe; and seemed scarcely to hear the comments and congratulations showered upon him.

Into the midst of these burst Trubie, with the old question, "Have you seen anything of Arling?" and hardly waiting for the general "No" which answered it, upstairs he rushed, three steps at a time, to the room of his friend. The stream of talk had scarcely resumed its flow, ere he was back again, with a hurried step, and a perturbed face.

"It's odd about Arling," he began, abruptly. "I can't get any answer, and there's nothing stirring in the room. But I looked into the keyhole, and the key is certainly inside."

Some few of the students, startled by his words, and the deep gravity of his look, gathered around him to discuss the matter, when a stout, gray-haired professor came out from the examination room.

"Good day, Mr. Trubie," said he, as he passed the group. "I hope your patient is doing well."

"I—I don't know, sir," faltered Trubie; "I have not seen him since yesterday, at dusk. And he is unaccountably missing this morning;—at least, I thought he must be out when I went to his room, at eight o'clock, and couldn't get in. But I have just been up again, and—and the door is certainly locked on the inside."

Being already in possession of the main facts of the case,—namely, that Alec Arling, one of the class of medical students now undergoing examination for their degree, had been suffering for some days from severe and increasing intestinal trouble, and had been advised by the faculty to

keep his room for a day or two, under the care of his friend, Frank Trubie ;—the professor now, by means of a few rapid questions, elicited the additional facts, that Trubie had been suddenly called away, on the previous evening, by family affliction, to his home in a near suburb, and had spent the night there, and that Edmund Roath, who had volunteered to keep a little watch over the sick-room during his absence, had remained with Arling till past midnight, engaged in comparing notes of clinical lectures, and in psychological talk (with which matters Arling *would* busy himself, in spite of remonstrance), and had then left him, recommending him to go to sleep at once, and had heard the door duly locked on his exit. Roath further stated that, in consequence of this protracted sitting, and previous hard work, he had slept late this morning ; and, taking it for granted that Trubie, according to promise, was already back at his post, he had seated himself at his books, immediately upon rising. Very shortly after, Trubie had appeared, and informed him that Arling had gone out, whereat he had been considerably surprised,—not that the young man was unable to leave his room, but because it was inexpedient to do so. Nevertheless, he frankly acknowledged that his mind was too much preoccupied to give more than a passing thought to the matter, especially as he knew well that any remissness on his part was sure to be amply atoned for by Trubie,—he and Arling being, as everybody knew, the Damon and Pythias of the class.

The professor was a man of few words, quick conclusions, and prompt action. “There is but one way of getting at the bottom of the matter,” said he, at the end of this rapid statement. “Let somebody bring a crowbar, and pry open the door.”

Scarce sooner said than done. The door yielded easily to the rude implement, in Trubie’s impetuous hands, and was followed by a rush of the assembled students toward the opening,—though, even in this moment of eager curi-

osity, the instinct of subordination allowed the professor to pass in first. He went straight to the bed, where was seen a human form, lying on its side, in an easy attitude of slumber. He bent for a moment above this form, while a sudden silence fell upon the startled spectators,—he touched the brow, lifted the hand, and then, turning slowly round, said, in deep, serious tones;—

“He is dead.”

Trubie let fall the crowbar, darted forward, and caught the hand of his dead friend, with a kind of indignant incredulity. But the icy touch, the marble pallor, the lifeless weight, brought instant conviction. He stood as if stunned.

The professor had turned from the bed to the table, where a glass, a spoon, and four or five phials, stood within easy reach of the dead man’s hand. He held the spoon to his nostrils, and then examined the phials, holding them up to the light. In one, labelled “*Mag. Sol. Morph.*,” he seemed to find what he sought.

“Mr. Trubie,” said he, turning round, with the open phial in his hand, “did your friend ever say anything to you, that indicated a disposition to suicide?”

The question roused the young man from his stupor, although it was a moment or two ere he seemed to comprehend its purport fully. “Never, sir!” he exclaimed, indignantly, a hot flush rising to his brow,—“Alec Arling would have scorned to do such a thing! He was neither a fool nor a coward, sir! Besides, there was no earthly reason why he should do it.”

The professor shook his head. “He seems to have done it, nevertheless,” said he, thoughtfully. “To be sure,” he added, after a moment, “it is barely possible that he took it by mistake.”

“Most likely, that is the real state of the case,” remarked Roath, who was standing on the other side of the table, calmly and gravely observant of the scene.

In temperaments like Trubie's, the transition from grief to anger is often curiously direct ; the one is the natural outlet of the other ; and in this instance, the sound of Roath's voice seemed to afford the bereaved and horrified young man the object of indignation that he so sorely needed. Springing quickly forward, and clenching his fist, he confronted the speaker with a convulsive rage and excitement in strong contrast with Roath's grave composure.

"You know better !" he shouted. "It was neither a suicide nor a mistake. You killed him !"

Roath gave a violent start, and seemed about to speak, but his lips only trembled nervously. He was evidently confounded, almost bewildered, by the suddenness and fierceness of the accusation.

Trubie went on with scarce a moment's pause, and with still hotter indignation, "You were last in his room—you acknowledge it. And you hated him."

Roath had regained his self-command,—which, to do him justice, he had but for an instant lost. "If you were not beside yourself with grief," said he, coldly, "there could be but one answer to such a charge as that. As it is—"

"'As it is,' I repeat it," interrupted Trubie, with bitter scorn. "I repeat it, and am ready to maintain it, always—anywhere—anyhow !"

Roath drew himself up. "I, too, am ready,"—he began, haughtily, but the professor interposed. "Mr. Roath," said he, with dignity, "I command you to be silent. Mr. Trubie,"—laying his hand on the shoulder of the agitated young man, and speaking in a tone of grave rebuke,—"*much may be forgiven to the first excitement of sorrow and horror, but this is going too far. Such an accusation is not to be made lightly.*"

"Lightly !" repeated the frantic Trubie,—"*he hated Alec, I tell you ! He couldn't forgive him for rivalling him—aye, and beating him, too—everywhere ; in scholar-*

ship, in popularity, in"—he hesitated for an instant,—“in love.”

Roath's face grew dark ; a frown traced a deep, vertical line between his brows ; he set his teeth, and made a quick stride forward. But a dozen hands seized him, a dozen others laid hold of Trubie, and both were half forced, half led away to their rooms ; while the faculty of the college, hastily called together, gathered around the corpse, to examine more minutely into the cause of death.

A coroner's jury was duly summoned. It examined the body, weighed the evidence, and being about equally divided in regard to the question of suicide, finally agreed upon “Accidental Death by Poison,” as, upon the whole, the safer and less objectionable verdict. There seemed to be no good reason to suspect murder, nor any ground whatever for implicating Roath, or anybody else, as a perpetrator thereof.

Trubie, to be sure, persisted in his accusation ; but it was with a vehemence and a dogmatism so unlike his wonted careless good nature, as to suggest the idea that his mind had been temporarily thrown off its balance by the shock of his friend's death. This idea gained color from the fact that all which he could offer, in support of so grave a charge, was the statement that he had long seen or suspected, in Roath a secret hatred of Arling, and a willingness to do him covert mischief. He had even mentioned the suspicion to his friend ; but Arling—being himself of the most candid and generous, as well as unsuspecting temper, unable to conceive of any but an open, honorable enemy—had refused to entertain it for a moment. Trubie also solemnly affirmed that his passionate accusation of Roath, by the side of the newly-discovered corpse, was the involuntary result of an intuition so sudden, so clear, and so powerful, that, though little given to look for supernatural agencies in human affairs, he could not rid himself

of the conviction that it was the direct inspiration of his dead friend. But it may readily be imagined how much weight a statement of this sort was likely to have with men of plain minds and sturdy understanding, searching among the external phenomena of the event for grounds upon which to base a reasonable verdict.

On the other hand, the theory of accidental poisoning was supported, negatively, by the lack of apparent cause for self-destruction; and positively, by the fact that on the dead man's table, side by side with the potent narcotic before mentioned, stood a phial of exactly the same size, and with equally colorless contents. Of this Arling had been accustomed to take two or three spoonfuls, mixed with a few drops of a third preparation of exceeding bitter flavor. A careless hand might have mistaken the one phial for the other. The taste of the morphine, so swallowed, would be much disguised; while the dose was sufficient, under the circumstances, to produce death. It will be seen, therefore, that the verdict rendered was the only one upon which a coroner's jury could well have been expected to agree.

The body was next solemnly laid in a vault, to await the disposal of the parents, who lived in a western state; and the widening circles of excitement, horror, curiosity, and regret, of which it had been the unconscious centre, rapidly subsided, or were effaced by the growing interests of the now imminent closing examination.

Even Trubie, though he flatly refused to acquiesce in the coroner's verdict, was forced tacitly to accept its results. He took refuge in a complete personal proscription of Roath; he neither spoke to him nor looked at him; he treated him precisely as if he did not exist. To a person of Roath's cold, hard, steely temper, and obtuse sensibilities, this demeanor was, perhaps, the most tolerable of which the circumstances admitted. It spared him the necessity of being either conciliatory or resentful; he was well content to ignore Trubie as completely as Trubie ignored him.

He soon found, however, that he had greatly underestimated the moral force of an abhorrence deeply rooted in immitigable distrust. Though largely given to psychological studies, and profoundly learned, for his years, in the intricacies and tendencies of the human mind, he was astonished to find how soon the atmosphere grew heavy around him, how quickly Trubie's dogged dislike communicated itself, more or less strongly, to others; while the increased cordiality of a few, though kindly intended to offset it, only served to point him out more clearly as one set apart, for the time, from life's ordinary course and level, by the force of an unenviable, if undeserved, notoriety. Not that he ever appeared to be conscious of either of these manifestations, or of their ultimate effect. Nature had given him a moral and intellectual fibre so tough, and he had trained himself to a control so perfect, that the keenest observer could not detect the least variation from his usual composed, concentrated, somewhat moody demeanor. Whatever of suffering, or of sin, lay at the bottom of his heart, not a shadow thereof was seen in his face.

It might well be, however, that he was glad when the examination was over, his degree obtained, and himself left free to depart by any one of the many paths which life opened before him.

Yet he was in no suspicious haste to be gone. His departure was fixed for an early hour on the following morning. Meanwhile, at dusk, he went out for his habitual solitary stroll. Never had he invited companionship, and seldom was it thrust upon him. He had no intimate friend. Though he had been not only admired, but respected, by many, for his intellectual gifts, and for a certain firm, even texture of character, and dispassionateness of judgment, that often looked like virtue, whether such in reality or not, he was beloved by none.

Where he went, what he thought, is not to the purpose of our narrative. His walk was long, however; he did not

return until dusk had deepened into clear and starry, but moonless night. As he came up through the great, dim elm-arches, with their solemn resemblance to a vast cathedral nave, a strange tremor seized him. A complete sceptic in regard to all superstitions and forebodings, he yet felt his nerves shaking with an undefined fear; he could not rid himself of the impression that something unprecedented and sinister was at that moment taking place. Reaching the college, he ascended the steps with a strange mixture of eagerness and reluctance; and immediately became aware of a subdued but excited murmur of voices in the upper hall. At the same moment, Mark Tracey came rushing down the stairs, carpet-bag in hand.

"What's up?" asked Roath, in a voice that trembled in spite of himself.

"I don't rightly know," responded Tracey, hurriedly,—
"I am so late for the train, that I couldn't stop to hear. Something about a diamond that Trubie has found in Arling's glass—the one from which the poor fellow drank his death-draught, I believe. Good-by!" And away he went.

Had he waited but for an instant, he would have been startled and spellbound by the deadly whiteness of Roath's face. Through all the glimmering indistinctness of the dimly-lighted hall, his features were clearly discernible, by reason of that marble pallor. For the moment, he seemed to lose sense and consciousness; he would have fallen, except for the friendly support of the wall against which he leaned.

But it was only for a moment. The man's hard energy of character, his iron will, his rigid self-control, though they had gone down before the suddenness and severity of the shock, quickly rose again. With a mighty effort, he rallied his broken forces; back into his face came the look of purpose, the sense of power, the sternness of immitigable resolve; and this with so rapid and almost imperceptible a

change, that it seemed as if the granite man must have stood there from the first, and the weak man not at all. While Tracey's receding footsteps still echoed faintly from without, going swiftly in the direction of the city's principal thoroughfare,—while the murmur of voices from above was still at its eager, wondering height,—he had turned, noiselessly descended the steps, and was gliding down through the sombre elm-arches, swift and stealthy as a phantom. The street was shadowy at best, but he chose the darker side; it was wellnigh deserted, at that hour, but he soon turned into a still less frequented one, and then struck into a more assured and less noiseless, as well as swifter, pace.

As he went, he drew a ring from his finger, and glancing hastily round, to make sure that he was unobserved, he flung it far into the dusky shadow of a garden thicket. Only the day before, a friend had said to him,—“Roath, do you know that the stone is gone from your ring?” and he had answered,—“Yes; and I am sorry to have lost it, for it was my father's.” And he had proceeded to point out the antique setting, and to describe the peculiar shape and tint of the gem which it had inclosed. He gnashed his teeth as he recalled the short, but momentous conversation. But for that, he would not have fled.

The garden into which he had flung the ring adjoined a small cottage; and, at one of the open windows, a gray-haired dame sat in a high-backed chair, listening to the clear, musical voice of an invisible reader. This fragment of a sentence floated out to him on the dim night air,—*“He shall be holden with the cords of—”*

Even at that moment, the words struck him sharply. Involuntarily he slackened his pace, and half-turned to catch the remainder of the sentence, but it was inaudible. The uncertainty before him, the terror behind, were, for the time, almost forgotten in a certain chill curiosity. “Holden with the cords—holden with the cords,” he re-

peated to himself, as he hurried on,—“I wonder what book she was reading! I should really like to hear the end of that sentence!”

Still keeping up his swift pace and vigilant glance, he nevertheless sank into a partial abstraction. Some disconnected sentences, breaking at intervals from his lips, served to show the current of his thoughts.

“Set it down, once for all,” he muttered, “that crime—absolute crime, of which the law can take hold—is a mistake.—Into the best-laid scheme, the one most carefully framed and skilfully executed, Chance—many would say, Providence (*can* there be a Providence after all?)—drops some trivial, fortuitous circumstance, which disconcerts or betrays everything.—The question is, could it have been foreseen?—I have worn that ring for sixteen years.—No! no! it is too subtle and too intricate a matter to think about now. I have more pressing subjects of reflection.—Only, set it down, for future use, that the essential thing is to keep clear of crime.”

“*Holden with the cords!*” echoed suddenly and pertinaciously through his memory, as if by way of defiant answer to the conclusion that he had reached. He set his teeth, and dashed more swiftly onward.

Ere long, he reached the railway depot. In a large, underground space, half-filled with smoke and steam, a train stood on the track, the engine fretting and snorting like a steed impatient to be off, and the bell ringing out a hasty summons, curiously typifying the sharp call to leap on to some favorable train of circumstances, and be borne away to fortune or to ruin, which life often gives us, at certain fateful moments of its rapid career. Roath sprang to the rear platform, and, on the instant, the train moved.

Swiftly it left the depot behind: decayed fences, rickety outhouses, heaps of rubbish and offal, quickly receded into a dingy perspective of backside city life; scattered coal-yards, and freight and engine-houses, succeeded; and then,

the cool, moist air coming in at the windows, and a swift-gliding panorama of what looked like a terrestrial sky and stars, told him that he was being borne rapidly along the causeway that traversed the broad bay,—in the tranquil waters of which the fair night-heavens were faithfully mirrored. Hastily running his eye over his fifty or sixty fellow-passengers, and finding no familiar face, he settled himself back in his seat with a long-drawn breath of relief. He remembered that he was on an express train, with twenty miles between him and the next station; he could count upon a safe half hour, at least, for the working out of the difficult problem before him. To that problem he at once addressed himself, with the whole force of his intellect and will;—though ever and anon, that perplexing fragment of a sentence *would* float distractingly through his mind, saying itself over and over to the accompaniment of the sharp click of the rails,—“Holden with the cords—Holden with the cords!”

From that night, for many years, Edmund Roath disappeared as completely from the sight and search of all who had known him, as if the train wherein he sat had suddenly flung itself headlong from that narrow causeway, and those deep, silent, star-mirroring waters, closing above him, had steadfastly refused to give up their dead. In brief space of time, his very name, as well as the circumstances that had made it notorious, was forgotten by those who had been most diligent in passing it from mouth to mouth. Seldom was it recalled even by the few who had known him best, and had yielded the heartiest admiration to his rare intellectual gifts. Having never taken any real hold of any human heart, it was but natural that he should pass behind the first intervening cloud, and leave no vacancy.

Did he thereby escape the worst consequences of his sin?

PART FIRST.

A WAY THAT SEEMETH RIGHT.

I.

“PROVERBS, AND THE INTERPRETATION.”

THE road was straight, level, and monotonous. It seemed to stretch on for miles, walled in, on either hand, by the rank and profuse foliage of the South. Great cottonwoods and water-oaks, walnuts, cypresses, larches, and junipers, stood side by side, with their brawny arms interlaced, and their trunks hidden in a dense and varied undergrowth; while jessamines and wild grapevines climbed up to meet the sunshine at their tops, and pendent moss hung their boughs with swaying drapery of gray-green leaves and filaments.

What lay beyond these walls of verdure was only to be guessed at from occasional and indistinct glimpses. Here, a transient view of corn or vegetable rows, and a sound of voices, gave token of the vicinity of a small plantation or market garden. There, a scarcity of deciduous trees and a predominance of evergreens, a more lush and succulent character of undergrowth, and a dark gleam of stagnant water, betrayed the proximity of an extensive morass. Frequently, the eye lost itself in the complicated vistas of thick pine-barrens, stretching far away to right and left. And, ever and anon, a sudden break in the long line of verdure, and the sight of a diverging wheel-track,

quickly lost amid overhanging boughs, served to show in what direction some large rice or cotton estate lay hidden in the circumjacent forest.

It scarcely needs to be added that the road was pleasantly cool and shadowy in the late September afternoon. Even at midday, its track would present but few and scant patches of sunshine, alternating with dense masses of shadow or spots of flickering light and shade. Now, therefore, with the sun hanging red and low in the western horizon, scarce a fitful orange gleam fell athwart the path of the only traveller in sight,—a young man, of thoughtful face and stalwart figure, striding on at a firm, even pace, with a portmanteau strapped across his shoulder. Both the face and the portmanteau seemed to indicate that his walk was not for pleasure merely, but tended to some definite, anticipated goal; while the keen, observant glance with which he noted, not only every object of interest along his route, but the character of the soil beneath and the foliage overhead, showed that his road was as unfamiliar as it had been, for the most part, solitary. Since he left the outskirts of the city of Savalla behind, more than two hours ago, he had seen but three human faces. First, an old negro woman, wrinkled and white-haired, had ducked her decrepit form to him in what would have been, but for the stiffness of her joints, a most deferential courtesy. Later on, a teamster, of the same dependent and obsequious race, had doffed to him the ragged remnant of a palm-leaf hat, and uttered a civil, "Good ebenin', Massa." Lastly, a lank, listless, unkempt, sallow-skinned personage, in a white covered wagon, snapping a long-lashed whip at a nondescript team, and belonging to the curious class known as "crackers," had suddenly nodded to him, after a prolonged, and, at first, contemptuous stare, as if finally convinced of his claim to the civility.

For some time past, the road had led through a monotonous pine barren, and the traveller had fallen into a fit of

thought. Raising his eyes, at last, from the path on which they had been fixed in abstraction, he saw that the long vista before him was once more enlivened by a moving object. His keen, far sight, trained in western wilds, easily made it out to be a half-obsolete kind of chaise, moving in the same direction as himself, but moving so slowly that he gained on it at every step. In a few moments, he was close behind it, quietly observing its superannuated style and condition, as well as the skinny little horse that furnished its motive power. Hearing the sound of his quick, firm tread, its occupant lifted his eyes from the tattered volume over which he was poring, and turned to look at him.

He himself, in a very different way, was well worthy of observation. He was small and spare, probably not more than sixty years of age, but looking much older. He had that parched and wizened look, oftenest the work of circumstances rather than years, which makes it difficult to realize that the possessor was ever young. His hair and complexion had once been light; the one was now gray, the other sallow, except for a faint suggestion of red at the tip of an otherwise handsome nose. His breath exhaled a perceptible odor of strong drink, surrounding him as with an atmosphere of inflammable gas. His dress was made up of divers ill-fitting garments that had doubtless accrued to him from cast-off wardrobes; not one of them bearing any relation to the other, but all being in an advanced stage of seediness well suited to the wearer. Something of the same fusing of special incongruities into general fitness also characterized his manner; wherein the mean and furtive air of the shiftless old vagabond was curiously blended with the pathetic dignity of the decayed gentleman.

He eyed the young foot traveller narrowly for a moment, though with a sidelong rather than a straightforward glance; then, bringing his willing horse to a stand by a jerk of the reins, and a sonorous “Whoa!” he lifted his hat and gravely accosted him:—

“*Manus manum lavat.* Men were meant to help each other. Have a ride, sir?”

The stranger hesitated, perhaps trying to reconcile the address and the speaker, perhaps with a natural enough doubt as to the character of the companionship thus offered. “Thank you,” said he, at last, “but I doubt if it be worth while.”

“‘Good and Quickly seldom meet,’” responded the other, sententiously. “Besides,” he added, seeing that the traveller was puzzled to understand the drift of his saw, “Pegasus—I call him Pegasus because he’s *not* winged—is ‘like a singed cat, better than he looks.’ Moreover, *Compagnon bien parlant vaut en chemin chariot branlant.* Which may be freely translated, ‘Good company shortens the road as much as a swift horse.’”

“Oh! I meant no disrespect to your equipage, I assure you,” returned the young man, smiling. “Only, I supposed that I must be near my journey’s end. Is it far to Berganton?”

“That depends. ‘The last straw breaks the camel’s back.’ It is three miles, more or less. But I should have said, from your face, that you would want to stop this side of that.”

“Do I look so tired? Indeed I am not.”

“Um—no, I should say not. But faces show something besides weariness,—‘like father, like son,’ you know. If your looks are to be trusted, there’s an old mansion about a quarter of a mile farther on, whose door ought to open to you of its own accord—if it can open at all.”

The young man smiled and shook his head. “I am sorry that my looks should belie me,” said he, “but I have no claim upon the said mansion’s hospitality.”

“Umph! ’tis a wise child that knows its own father. Tush, tush, man!” he added, hastily, seeing the young man’s cheek flush, “I meant no harm; proverbs run from my tongue like water from a Dutch roof. Besides, *Nao ha*

pulavra mal dita se naõ fora mal entendida,—that is to say, ‘No word is ill-spoken which is not ill-taken.’ But come! come! jump in! I’ll carry you to Berganton, since that’s your goal, and welcome. The night is drawing on apace; you’ll be glad of my pilotage before we get there.”

The young man glanced down the darkening road, from which the last ray of sunlight had vanished, and seemed still to hesitate; but finally sprang lightly into the chaise, and the horse jogged on.

“Proverbs,” continued the old man, treating his three last sentences as mere parentheses, “have been the study of my life. I know Lord Chesterfield bans them as vulgar, but is he wiser than Solomon? or better authority than Cicero and Scaliger and Erasmus and Bacon and Bentley? Bah! the whole gist of his writings might be compressed into two or three of the maxims that he affects to despise. ‘Fair-and-Softly goes far in a day,’ will live when his ‘Letters’ are forgotten. And a good reason why. Proverbs are the royal road to wisdom. They’re the crystalized experience of the ages. They epitomize the minds and manners of the people that brought them forth. Who but a ‘smooth, fause’ Lowland Scot, for instance, would have said ‘Rot him awa’ wi’ butter an’ eggs?’ Who but a marauding Hielander would have declared, ‘It’s a bare moor that ane goes o’er and gets na a coo?’ Who but poor priest-ridden, king-ridden Spain would have said, *Fraile que pide por Dios, pide por dos*, ‘The friar that begs for God, begs for two;’ *Quien la vaca del rey come flaca, gorda la paga*, ‘He who eats the king’s cow lean, pays for it fat;’—but I ought to beg your pardon, perhaps you know Spanish?”

“Not very well,” good-naturedly replied the young man, taking pity on his companion’s inveterate habit of translation, and the delight which it plainly afforded him.

“Well enough, I suppose, to know that it’s a mine of wealth to the proverb-hunter,” rejoined the old man gra-

ciously. "Here, now, is a good one, of a different character,—*Adonde vas, mal? Adonde mas hay*, 'Whither goest thou, misfortune? To where there is more?' And here is a pertinent question for people who live well without visible resources,—*Los que cabras no tienen, y cabritos venden, de donde les vienen?* 'They who keep no goats, and yet sell kids, where do they get them?' But, after all, for right sharp and serviceable proverbs, commend me to the Danish. Here is an old collection that I've lately picked up, printed at Copenhagen, in 1761;—just let me read you two or three."

He opened the dingy volume aforementioned, and proceeded to read, translate, and comment, with infinite zest. "*Ingen kommer i Skaden, uden han selv hielper til*, 'No man gets into trouble without his own help'—(a moral which no one can point better than your humble servant); *Naar det regner Vælling, saa har Stodderen ingen Skee*, 'When it rains porridge, the beggar has no spoon'—(there's no contenting discontented people); *Ingen Ko kaldes broget uden hun haver en Flek*, 'A cow is not called dappled unless she has a spot'—(most gossip has some small foundation); *Hvo som vil gjøre et stort Spring, skal gaae vel tilbage*, 'He that would leap high must take a long run'—(else we should have bishops and judges without gray hairs); *Det kommer igjen, sagde Manden, han gav sin So Flæsk*, 'It will come back again, said the man, when he gave his sow pork:'—don't you see how the patient, shrewd, humorous character of the Danes peeps through them all?

"Yet, if some proverbs are national, others are cosmopolitan, and fit all generations, and all countries. For instance, there's the Greek saw, *Ἀρχὴ ἡμῖν πάντες*,—see how it comes down through every language under the sun, till, at last, it settles into terse English rhyme,

'Well begun
Is half done.'

Or, take that common saying, 'To carry coals to New-

castle,’ which seems to have originated in the East. At least, we find it first in the Persian of Saadi, ‘To carry pepper to Hindostan;’ then the Hebrews have it, ‘To carry oil to the City of Olives;’ the Greeks, ‘owls to Athens;’ the Latins, ‘wood to the forest;’ the French, ‘water to the river;’ the Dutch, ‘firs to Norway;’ the Danish—Hallo! Pegasus! what are you about?”

The horse, being left to his own guidance while his master was riding his favorite hobby, had taken occasion to shoot off from the main road into an apparently little-used track, cut through a thick pine-barren at the left. He had made several lengths before his driver, taken at a disadvantage, could pull him up.

“Pegasus is of the opinion that ‘the longest way round is the surest way home,’” remarked the old man, apologetically, as he scanned the narrow, tree-lined track, with a view to the possibility of turning safely around. “Or,” he added, with a glance of sly humor at the traveller, “perhaps he thinks, as I did just now, that Bergan Hall is your natural destination.”

“Bergan Hall,” repeated the young man, in a tone of extreme surprise,—“is this the way to Bergan Hall? I thought you came to the village first, from Savalla.”

“So you did, once,” rejoined the old man, looking surprised, in his turn; “but that must have been before you were born, if your face doesn’t belie your age. The road used to make a long elbow, to get round that swamp which you crossed a mile back. But it was straightened thirty years ago at least,—*Autre temps, autre chemin*,—a different time, a different road. And so you *are* going to Bergan Hall? Well, thanks to luck and Pegasus, you’re in the right way.”

“But I must not take you out of yours,” responded the young man, good-naturedly. And he had jumped out of the chaise before its owner was well aware of his intention.

"*Canis festinans cæcos parit catulos*," muttered the old man, in a tone of chagrin. "In other words, 'Look before you leap.' I'd as soon have gone this way as the other. My place lies between the Hall and the village, and the choice of roads isn't worth shucks,—at least, in comparison with a pleasant chat. However, you're out, and I suppose it's no use to ask you to get in again, since the Hall is but a few rods away. Keep straight ahead till you come to the old avenue, then turn to the left. Good day, *il n'y a si bons compagnons qui ne se separent*,—the best friends must part."

"Yes—to meet again," said the young man, pleasantly.

"Very true; *les beaux esprits se rencontrent*," returned the old man, slowly and cautiously backing his crazy vehicle around. And with another "Good day," and a parting gesture, he quickly disappeared among the fast-falling shadows.

The young man stood looking after him for a moment, with a smile half of amusement, half of pity, upon his lips. But his features soon settled into something more than their accustomed gravity, and suddenly facing about, he pursued his way.

Ere long the tall, crowded pines of the barren gave place to various stubble and fallow grounds, with here and there a late crop waiting to be harvested; and shortly after, the narrow, irregular track that he had been following encountered a broader and more beaten one. Recognizing this, with some difficulty, as the "avenue" of which his late companion had spoken, he stopped, and gazed up and down with a look of surprise and pain.

It was bare of trees; but on either side extended a long row of live oak stumps, the size of which showed what massive trunks and far-reaching branches had once columned and arched it like a temple. Here and there, some forgotten bole or bough lay and rotted upon the very spot which it had formerly overhung with a soft canopy of

verdure, and made beautiful with pleasant play of sunshine and leaf-shadow; while around it gathered a rank luxuriance of weeds, transmuting its slow aristocratic decay into teeming, plebeian life. In one or two cases, as if moved by an almost human sympathy, vines had sprung up around the bereaved stumps, and sought to soften their hard outlines with clinging drapery of leaves and tendrils. They had also done their best to cover up various unsightly gaps in the long lines of ruinous fence that divided the avenue from the open fields on either side. Yet the final effect of these gentle touches was only to deepen the painful impression of the scene. Where they did not reach, the bareness was so much more bare, the dilapidation so much uglier!

The young observer felt this bareness and dilapidation to his heart's core,—felt it all the more keenly because an image of the avenue's pristine grandeur, derived from the surrounding fragments (or from some other source), continually rose before his mind's eye, to heighten its present desolation by contrast. His brow contracted as he gazed; and the expression of his face changed rapidly from surprise to dissatisfaction, from dissatisfaction to perplexity, from perplexity to doubt. Once, he turned as if half-minded to retrace his steps; but the next moment, he shook off his irresolution with a gesture of disdain, and immediately hastened forward.

The avenue terminated in an open, circular space. Evidently, it had once been a lawn; but it was now covered with half-obliterated furrows, showing that at some not very remote period, it had been planted with corn. Around it stood a number of gigantic live-oaks, heavily draped with moss, and brooding dusky shadows under their massive boughs. Fronting upon it, was a large mansion of dark brick, consisting of an upright, two-story main building, with a huge, clustered chimney in the midst, and long, low, rambling wings on either side.

The whole place had a deserted and melancholy appearance. The moss on the live-oaks swayed slowly to and fro in the evening breeze, with a wonderfully sombre and funereal effect; and the mansion was dark and silent as any ruin. Not a light shone from the closed windows; not a sound came from the deep, shadowy doorway; and the unsteady stone steps, slippery with damp and green with moss, gave the impression of a spot where no human foot had left its print for many years.

The young man halted at a little distance from the dark building, and surveyed it moodily. "Can *this* be Bergan Hall?" he murmured. "Can this gloomy old ruin be the open, cheery, hospitable mansion, full of light and life, that my mother has so often described to me? It looks a habitation for ghosts—and for ghosts only! I wonder if any living being—"

Breaking off abruptly, he ascended the moss-grown steps, only to find that the vines which so heavily draped the portico, had woven a thick network across the door. It was plain that it had not been opened for months, perhaps years. Nevertheless, not to be easily daunted, he found and lifted the knocker. It fell with a dull lifeless sound, that smote the young man's heart like a sudden chill. A dreary reverberation came from within, and then died away into silence. He knocked again, and, listening intently, he fancied that he heard the sound of stealthy footsteps within, and a slight creaking of the floor. But so dead a silence followed upon these imaginary sounds, that he soon became convinced of his involuntary self-deception.

Turning from the door, he now noticed a little footpath running round the end of one of the long wings. Committing himself to this timely guide, he soon came in sight of the rear of the mansion, which looked upon a sort of court; where a few ornamental shrubs still held an uncertain tenure against the encroachments of divers sorts of

lawless and vagrant vegetation. At a little distance, was a long range of dilapidated offices, showing upon what an almost princely scale the housekeeping had once been administered. But this part of the premises was not less dark, silent, and deserted, than the other.

The footpath still held on, however, past the court and the offices, toward a bright light at a considerable distance. “The negro quarter!” muttered the young man, recognizing the whereabouts of one of the most salient features of his mother’s well-remembered descriptions. “At least, I may learn there what it all means.” And, quickening his steps, he soon came upon a busy and picturesque scene.

In the midst of a large, quadrangular space, flanked on three sides by double rows of negro-cabins, and on the fourth apparently sloping down to a water-course, was a rough sort of threshing-mill, now idle, but showing satisfactory results of its day’s labor in a large heap of rice by its side. A crowd of negroes, of both sexes, coarsely and uncouthly clad, were busily filling odd, shallow baskets from this heap, which they then poised on their heads, and bore off down the slope to some unseen goal. There were two regular, silent files, the one coming, the other going; and the heap of grain steadily and even swiftly diminished. Near the mill, stood the only white person visible,—a large, powerfully-framed man, carelessly and even shabbily dressed, yet with the unmistakable air of ownership about him. At his left hand, a half-naked, impish looking negro boy was holding a blazing pitch-pine torch, by the light of which he seemed to be jotting down some sort of memoranda in a small book.

The scene was even more strange and weird than picturesque. The dark figures of the negroes, filing noiselessly up the shadowed slope, suddenly grew distinct, wild, and fantastic, within the circle of enchantment made by the flaring light of the torch, only to become dim and spectral again when received back into the dusk. They might have

passed for embodiments of those vagaries of the mind, which come from no one knows whither, play their fitful parts within the illuminated circle of the imagination, and vanish as they came. The young man would almost have taken it as a matter of course, had the whole spectacle suddenly melted into thin air.

Yet, even in that case, he would have expected the masterful personage aforementioned to have remained, as the one tangible link between the phantasms and the earth. In truth, a single glance at his massive figure, which seemed to have been hewn out of the rock, rather than moulded from any softer material, went far to disenchant the scene. Here was a touch of the actual, the substantial, and the dogmatic, not to be mistaken; and serving as a clue to the reality of everything else.

Toward this personage, after a moment's scrutiny, the young man unhesitatingly made his way, with the air of one who has found something certain amid much that is confused, illusory, and perplexing. He was immediately spied by the negroes, and followed by their curious gaze; albeit, they ventured not to intermit their labor for an instant, but contented themselves with slowly and stiffly turning their burdened heads toward him as they marched on, and keeping their shining black eyes fixed on him to the last, in such wise that the heads of the retreating file seemed to have been set on backwards. The boy with the torch was perhaps the most wondering, open-mouthed gazer of them all.

As yet, the master of the premises had not been made aware of the stranger's approach; but, looking up to reprimand his torch-bearer for inattention, he observed the imp's dumbfounded gaze, and turned to see what had caused it.

"My uncle, Mr. Bergan, I presume," said the young man, taking off his hat, and bowing low: "I am Bergan Arling." And he added, after a moment, seeing that the other did not speak, "I bring you a letter from my mother."

II.

STUDYING TO ANSWER.

MAJOR BERGAN—to give him the title by which he was known throughout the country round—displayed no alacrity of welcome. He first scanned his visitor closely from head to foot, and then silently extended his hand for the letter which the young man had drawn forth from an inner pocket.

“Hold that light here!” were his first words, in a tone deep as a thunder-peal, and addressed not to Bergan Arling, but to the aforesaid torch-bearer. “And quit your staring, and mind your business, or I’ll—”

The sentence died away in an inarticulate growl, but the boy was plainly at no loss to understand its purport. With a startled look, he fixed his eyes on the torch, and only ventured to withdraw them for an occasional, furtive glance at the object of his curiosity. Meanwhile, his master opened the letter, and read it deliberately from beginning to end. The light of the torch fell full upon his face as he did so, giving Bergan Arling an opportunity to study him, in his turn.

His face was a striking one; in youth it had doubtless been handsome. Now, his brow was too massive, his mouth too stern, his eyes too cold, his beard too gray and heavy, to bear any relation to mere personal beauty. All soft lights and lines had long gone out of them; what remained was hard, bold, and rugged, as a rocky headland in winter. The rude strength which was the marked characteristic of his form, repeated itself emphatically in his face. Compar-

ing it with the mental portrait, carefully touched and re-touched by his mother's hand, which Bergan had carried in his mind since childhood, he felt that the one resembled the other only as a tree in autumn, stripped bare of its foliage and its blossoms, resembles the same tree in its gracious summer bloom and verdure. Little trace of the frank, proud lineaments, the warm, yet generous temper, of that ideal picture, was to be found in this harsh, stubborn, sarcastic face; the face of a man long given over to the hardening influences of a solitary and a selfish life. In short, Major Bergan confirmed anew the old truth that no man can live long for himself alone, shutting out all gentler ties and amenities, and driving straight at his own practical ends, unmindful of either the ways, the opinions, or the feelings of others, without reaping his due reward in a loss of moral health, and a gradual decay of all his finer sensibilities and higher instincts.

The only point wherein the real man resembled the ideal one, was in a certain ineffaceable pride of birth, showing itself not only in his port, but darkening his harsh features with a heavy shade of hauteur.

Yet a smile might do much to light up and soften the Major's face; and the smile came when he had finished the letter, and did its work all the more effectually because it was a somewhat sad one.

"Forty and two years," said he, musingly, "since Eleanor went! Yet I can see her now, with her bright face and her arch ways! She was the sunshine of the old Hall; it has never been the same place since she left it. And she would hardly know it, if she were to come back now! But times change; and we are fools if we do not change with them. Well, my boy! I'm glad to see you, and that is not what I would say to many,—I'm not much in the way of having visitors. But Eleanor's son is heartily welcome to the old place."

He took his nephew's hand, shook it cordially, and con-

tinued to hold it in a vice-like grasp, while he once more attentively scanned the young man's features.

"You are a true Bergan," he said, at length, "I'm glad to see that! And you have *her* eyes, too. Ah, what eyes they used to be! as soft and bright as any fawn's! Well! well! it's no use to think of the old times—they can't come back. But I *am* right glad to see you, my boy; and I take it very kind of Eleanor to have sent you to me. Is she much changed?"

"I suppose so," said Bergan, smiling,—“that is, since you knew her. She has not changed greatly during my remembrance. She is a young-looking woman yet, for her years; her eyes are still bright, and her cheeks rosy. Our western climate and life have agreed with her well. Yet I cannot fancy her a young lady.”

"Ah, but you shall see her as a young lady! There's a portrait of her in the old house, taken not long before she went away, that does everything but speak and move. Indeed, I used to imagine that it did both, when I had it in my quarters out here, as I did for a time. But it gave me the blues so, to look at it, and think how things used to be, and see how they had altered, that I finally sent it back to its old place in the portrait gallery. But how did you get here, at this hour?"

"I walked from Savalla, leaving my baggage—except this portmanteau—to come on by stage to-morrow.”

"Walked! A nice little tramp of thirteen miles or more! Why in the name of sense didn't you ride?"

"I was too late for the stage, and could not readily find a hack. To be sure, I wasted but little time in looking for one; I do not mind walking, I am used to it.”

"That may do very well for the West. But you'll lose caste, my boy, if you walk here. You must have a horse.”

"When I can afford it," replied the young man, lightly shrugging his shoulders. "Meanwhile, doubtless I shall

find my western habit useful, if vulgar. But I am not prepared to admit that it is vulgar. A young English nobleman, who spent some months in our neighborhood, was a practised walker; he thought nothing of fifteen or twenty miles, on occasion. And if it was 'caste' for him, why not for me?"

"Humph! we Southerners boast a good deal of our English ancestors, but we don't feel called upon to imitate them!"

With the softening recollections of his youth, the Major had also laid aside his unwonted gentleness of manner; and the freezing satire of his last words, though it was doubtful whether he meant it for himself or his nephew, pained the young man's ear. Instinctively he dropped the discussion.

"I forgot to mention," said he, "that I did not walk quite the whole distance. A queer old character whom I overtook, insisted upon giving me a lift to Berganton."

"To Berganton! What had you to do with Berganton, I should like to know?"

"I was not aware that the road had been changed; I supposed that I must needs pass through the village on my way to Bergan Hall. I intended to stay there over night, and come to you early in the morning,—I did not think it right to descend upon you suddenly, late at night. But finding myself unexpectedly on the road hither, and almost in sight of the Hall, I regarded it as an indication of Providence not to be misunderstood."

"And well you did!" returned the Major, with rude emphasis, "well you did! I should have taken it as a direct insult if my sister's son had slept anywhere in this region, but on the old place. I wish I could say, under the old roof," he went on, in a friendlier tone, "but that leaks like a sieve, and I quitted it long ago. Of course, it might have been mended; but, to tell the truth, the old house was much too big and gloomy and damp and dis-

agreeable to keep bachelor's hall in comfortably, and I was glad to get out of it. Besides, I'd had all sorts of trouble with my overseers, and I decided that the only way to have things managed to my mind was to manage them myself. In order to do that, it was necessary to be on the spot. So I fixed up my overseer's cottage into a snug little box for myself, where I'm as cosey and comfortable as a rat in a rice-heap. But come in, and see for yourself how it looks. Jip, you rascal! why don't you take your young master's portmanteau?"

The torch-boy caught the portmanteau, and Bergan followed his uncle into a small cottage at one corner of the quadrangle, so situated as to command a view both of the mill and the cabins. The room into which he was ushered was plainly but comfortably furnished. A fire of pitch-pine knots blazed on the hearth, reddening the rough walls and the bare floor with its pleasant glow. A slipshod negress, with a gay turban, was busy laying the table for supper. The effect was, upon the whole, cheery, and ought to have been especially so to a tired and hungry traveller; yet Bergan looked around him with a manifest air of disappointment. His uncle noticed it, and remarked, apologetically,

"You would prefer to see the Hall, eh? Well, you shall see it in the morning, and I reckon you'll agree with me that it's anything but a cheerful-looking abode. Though, if I had known that a nephew of mine was coming to keep me company, I don't know but I should have stayed there."

The negress now signified that supper was on the table, the food having been brought in, ready cooked, from the nearest cabin; and Major Bergan pointed to a chair opposite his own.

"Sit down, Harry, and fall to. Your tramp must have given you a right sharp appetite."

"Thank you. But, uncle, my name is Bergan, not Harry."

"Not Harry!" repeated the Major, sharply,— "I should like to know the reason why! Didn't your mother write that she had named you for me?"

"Yes, certainly. But she regarded you as the head of the family, and in giving me the family name—"

"She named you for the whole breed—my degenerate half-brother and all!" interrupted the Major, bringing his clenched fist down upon the table with a force that threatened to demolish it. "I tell you what it is, sir, I shall not stand any half-way work! If you are named after me, you've got to go the whole figure. Harry Bergan Arling you are, and Harry Bergan Arling you shall be,—at least as long as you stay in these parts."

The imperious tone of this speech was by no means agreeable to Bergan's ear; it was not without an effort that he replied, pleasantly;—

"Call me what you like, uncle. I shall not refuse to answer to any name that you are pleased to give me."

Major Bergan was evidently much gratified. "That's right, my boy!—we'll shake hands upon that!" he exclaimed, heartily. "I'm glad to see that Eleanor has raised her son in the good old fashion of submission to elders. Bless my soul! I thought it was entirely obsolete. Young men round here know more at twenty than the fathers that begot them. As for obedience, they leave that to the negroes."

The meal was abundant and substantial. It consisted of a single course, of bacon, vegetables, and corn-bread, very simply, not to say rudely, served. It would seem that the master of the feast cared no more for refinements of table than of manner. Here, as elsewhere, were to be seen the pernicious effects of his solitary mode of life. He ate greedily; he forgot his duties as host, or they came but tardily to his remembrance; he fell into fits of abstraction, and started as from a dream at the sound of his nephew's voice. Yet tokens were not wanting that he had once

been well versed in the art of external manners. At intervals, answering involuntarily, as it were, to the touch of Bergan's fine, natural courtesy, the gentlemanly instincts of earlier days revived, and flung a momentary grace around his words and actions. It was like the sunbeams that occasionally glimmer out over a cloudy landscape, attracting the gaze even more surely than any full blaze of splendor, yet causing a certain impatience, as if they ought either to kindle into satisfactory brightness, or be wholly extinguished. The rudeness of his ordinary manner was only thrown into bolder relief by these flashes of a half-extinct good breeding.

To meet the demands of thirst, a bottle of brandy, and another of water, stood by Major Bergan's plate; which, after filling his own glass, he pushed over to his nephew.

"There, Harry! that is what will put new life into you, after your journey."

"Thank you; but I seldom use brandy."

"A little too strong for you, eh?" returned the Major, indulgently. "Well, there's a stock of wine in the cellar of the Hall,—I reckon some of it must be fifty or sixty years old, it has been there ever since I can remember,—I'll send for a bottle or two of that." And he uplifted a stentorian call of "Jip," which brought that urchin-of-all-work to the door, in breathless haste.

"Uncle,"—began Bergan, but the Major was thundering out minute directions about cellars, and keys, and tiers, and labels, and either could not, or would not, hear.

"I am sorry that you have given yourself the trouble," said Bergan, when quiet was restored. "I do not care for wine."

Major Bergan set down his glass, and looked at his nephew sternly and gloomily. "Don't tell me that you are a mean-spirited teetotaller," he growled. "I can't say how I might take it. There never was a milksop in the family yet."

"No, I am hardly that. But I am not accustomed to use spirituous liquors of any sort. And I certainly do not need them. I am in perfect health; I hardly know what it is to feel tired."

"I wish I didn't!" muttered his uncle, a little less savagely. "I'm pretty hearty, for my years, to be sure. But an ache gets into my bones now and then, just to remind me that I am not so young as I was once. And the best thing to rout it is a good glass of brandy. Better take one?"

"Not if you will be so good as to excuse me," replied Bergan, with a smile so frank, and a gesture so courteous, that the Major was irresistibly mollified.

"A guest's wish is a command," said he, with one of his rare glimmers of courtesy. "But here comes the wine! I really cannot excuse you from that,—at least, I should be very loath to do so. I'll even join you in a glass. Here's to your mother's health and happiness!—you won't refuse to drink that, not on the place where she was raised."

If Bergan was annoyed by his uncle's persistency, he forebore to show it. But, having duly honored the toast, he pushed his glass aside, and declined every invitation to have it refilled.

"Well, well," said his uncle, at last, in a tone of resignation, "we won't quarrel about it now. But I see that your education is incomplete, and I shall take it upon myself to finish it. If I don't teach you to drink like a gentleman, in a month, I shall know that you are no true Bergan, in spite of your looks."

Bergan only smiled.

"Your temperance is the one thing I don't like about you," pursued his uncle, filling his own glass to the brim. "Ah, yes, there's one more;—your mother writes that you have studied law, and mean to practise it."

"Yes; I received my license just two months ago."

"Humph! it's well named! 'License,' indeed! Licensed

to lie, cheat, steal,—or, at least, to help others to do so, which amounts to the same thing. No, no, Harry; it may be well to know law enough to keep from being imposed upon, but a Bergen can't stoop to practise it. Lawyers are, without exception, a set of miserable, lying, sneaking pettifoggers. You could drop the souls of a dozen into a child's thimble, and they'd rattle in the end of it after she had put it on her finger."

Bergen's cheek flushed a little, but he was more impressed by the comic than the provoking side of his uncle's dogged prejudice, and he only answered, good-humoredly;—

"I am sorry that you should have had occasion to think so badly of the profession. I shall feel that it is incumbent upon me to make you change your opinion."

"Never!" growled Major Bergen, with an oath. "You would find it easier to lift the Gibraltar rock on the point of a needle. Unless," he added, after a moment, "you can tell me how to make a suit lie against Godfrey Bergen. I've been trying it for ten years, and I've spent money enough to buy another plantation as large as this."

"My uncle Godfrey!" exclaimed Bergen, in much surprise. "Why, what has he done?"

"You had better not call him your 'uncle Godfrey' in my hearing," responded the Major, grimly. "In ceasing to be my half-brother, he ceased to be your uncle. Done! What hasn't he done? First, he got his head filled with cursed abolitionist notions, and freed all his slaves. Next, he offered the greater part of his land for sale at public auction;—just think of it! some of the old lands of Bergen Hall put up to be knocked down to the highest bidder! But I settled *that* business, by proclaiming far and wide that whoever bid for them might expect to reckon with me for his impertinence; and as I'm known to be a man of my word, no one dared to lift his voice at the sale, and I got them at my own price. Finally Godfrey capped the climax of his degeneracy by opening a hardware store in

Berganton. Think of that, Harry!—a Bergan of Bergan Hall, with a long pedigree of warriors and nobles at his back, standing behind a counter, selling hoes and tea-kettles to negroes and crackers!”

Bergan was silent. Though not without some touch of family pride, derived from his mother, he had nevertheless been taught to believe all upright labor honorable, to hold that life was ennobled from within, by its motive and aim, rather than from without, by its place and form. He could not help suspecting, therefore, that his host, deliberately leading the narrow life of an overseer of slaves, on his ancestral estate, was in reality a more degenerate son of his house than the relative whom he so bitterly condemned. Yet he foresaw that any attempt to defend Godfrey Bergan would but result in bringing down upon himself a torrent of fierce, half-drunken vituperation. Seasoned vessel though he were, the Major's repeated draughts of brandy, very little diluted, had not been without effect, in flushing his face, and inflaming his habitually irritable temper. His present mood would ill brook contradiction.

Fortunately, he neither expected nor waited for an answer. Hastily emptying his glass and filling it again, he went on.

“Now, Harry, if you can tell me any way by which I can ruin his business, turn him out of his house, and make him quit the country, I'll own that I've done the law an injustice, and give you a handsome fee besides. Can the thing be done?”

Bergan silently shook his head; he would not trust himself to speak.

“Just as I told you!” exclaimed the Major, with great virulence of expression. “The law has plenty of quibbles and quirks for the help of rogues and scoundrels, but it can't lend a hand to an honest cause, at a pinch! I'll none of it, Harry! I'll none of it! Get what you know of it out of your head as soon as you can.”

The Major paused long enough to empty his glass, and then resumed, in a more amiable tone. "The best thing you can do, Harry, is to stay here with me; I'll make a rice-planter of you. It doesn't take a ninny for that, by any means; your talents will not be thrown away. And if we suit each other,—as I think we shall,—I'll give you Bergan Hall when my title to it expires. To be sure, I'm strong and hearty yet; but no one lasts forever. And as you are named for me, and I like your looks, I would rather give it to you than anybody else. In fact, I've had it in my mind, for some time, to write to Eleanor and ask her to do just what she has done,—send one of her boys to live with me, and be my heir."

"You mistake," said Bergan, quickly, "neither my mother nor myself had any such idea. She merely wished me to consult you about commencing my profession in—"

"Tut! tut! Harry," interrupted his uncle, "*I* meant it, if you and she did not. And I mean it more than ever now; that is, if you'll yield to my wish about the law. But if you persist in sticking to that, I give you up, once for all—mind, I give you up!"

"I should deserve to be given up," replied Bergan, smiling, "if I were lightly to forsake a vocation for which I am fitted both by taste and education, to enter upon one of which I know absolutely nothing. I may reasonably hope to succeed as a lawyer; I fear I should make but a poor planter. Moreover, it would not suit me to be dependent upon any one."

"Stuff! nonsense!" exclaimed Major Bergan, bluntly. "I defy you to make a poor planter under my tuition,—I claim to understand that business. As for dependence, never you fear but that I shall get aid and comfort enough out of you to make our accounts square. For, after all, Harry, it is a dreary kind of a life that I'm leading, without chick or child, kith or kin, to speak to, or to care for. I cannot help asking myself, sometimes, what is the good

of it all, and how is it to end. But with a fine young fellow like you here, to enter into my plans now, and carry them out after I'm gone,—why, it would be like a fresh lease of life to me! We'll rebuild the old house, you shall drop the 'Arling,' and behold the seventh Harry Bergan of Bergan Hall, on *this* side the water! And really, I don't see how you can do better, Harry. Here are wealth, position, influence, and a chance to oblige your old uncle,—ready to your hand. Stay, my boy, stay!"

The Major's bluff voice had sunken to a hoarse tone of sadness, in his confession of loneliness, and finally, to one of entreaty, that touched his nephew's heart. Nor was the prospect held up before him without its own peculiar and powerful attraction. He looked thoughtfully into the fire, debating with himself what and how he should reply. His uncle watched him keenly for a moment, and then said, in his kindest tone and manner;—

"Well, Harry, I won't press you for an answer, now. Stay here a month or two, and look around you; and then, we'll talk the matter over again, and see if we cannot settle upon something that shall be mutually satisfactory. For so long, surely, you can afford to be my guest."

III.

"PATTERN OF OLD FIDELITY."

BEFORE Bergan could answer, there came a low tap at the door. A negro woman, of unusual height, and singularly venerable and dignified aspect, stood, courtesying slightly, on the threshold. She was plainly of great age,—her face was deeply furrowed, and her hair, where it could be seen under the dark blue kerchief that covered her head, was white as snow,—yet her shoulders had not bent under the burden of years, her tall frame, though gaunt, was little palsied by the touch of actual infirmity. Although she carried a cane, it was not so much for its support, as for its aid in feeling out her way along her accustomed paths; she had been blind for many years.

"Master Harry," said she, clasping her hands over the head of her cane, and speaking in slow, somewhat tremulous tones, but with neither the slovenly utterance nor the vicious pronunciation of the ordinary slave,—“Master Harry, excuse me if I interrupt you, but I could not wait any longer,—I wanted so much to see Miss Eleanor’s son!”

“It is Maumer Rue,” said Major Bergan, not only with unwonted kindness of tone, but with something akin to respect in his manner;—“your mother must have spoken to you of our old nurse, Harry?”

“Indeed she has!” exclaimed Bergan, earnestly, starting up to take the blind woman’s hand. “Your name has always been a household word with us. The story of your devotion to my mother, in saving her from the flames, at the risk of your own life, and with the ultimate loss of your sight, was the one story of which we children

never used to tire. Probably we felt, in our vague, childish way, that it was the one which came from the profoundest depth in her own heart,—since she could never tell it to us without a little tremor in her voice, and a soft dewiness in her eyes,—and that was the secret of its charm for us. You may be sure that she has never forgotten how much she owes you!”

The old woman’s lips trembled, and large tears gathered in her sightless eyes. “The Lord bless my dear young lady!” she ejaculated fervently,—“I knew she would never forget her old maumer. And it’s like her to make much of my little service; but I did nothing but what was my duty—nothing.”

“She thinks otherwise,” replied Bergan, kindly. “She regards it as one of those rare instances of courage and devotion, for which the whole world is better and brighter. She bade me give you her kindest love, and tell you that you must not despair of meeting her once more, even on this side the grave. When the new railroad is finished, as far as our place,—which it promises to be in a year or two,—she fully intends to revisit her childhood’s home, and look once more upon the faces of her childhood’s friends. She furthermore charged me to pay you an early visit, in your own quarters, and tell you everything about her western home and life that you might care to hear.”

“How kind of Miss Eleanor to think of that!” responded the blind woman, delightedly. “It shows that she’s just her own old self, always trying to think what everybody would like, and then doing her best to give it to them. Of course, there’s a hundred questions that I should like to ask about her; and if you really don’t mind answering them, and will do me the honor to step into my little cabin, some day when you’re passing by, I shall be more obliged to you than I can rightly tell. But as to my ever seeing Miss Eleanor again,—I beg your pardon, sir; you see I’ve not yet learned to say Mrs. Arling,—though

there's nothing on earth that would make me so glad as to meet her again, and hear the sound of her sweet, cheery voice, yet I'm getting to be too old to dare to reckon much upon the future. But the next best thing to meeting her, is to meet her son, here on the old place; and I thank the Lord that He has let me live long enough for that."

The old negress bent her head devoutly for a moment, and then turned to Major Bergan. "Does he favor Miss Eleanor much, Master Harry?" she asked.

"Yes, he is a good deal like her, maumer; he has her eyes exactly. But he is even more like what I was forty years ago; it really makes me feel young again to look at him. He's a real Bergan, I can tell you that."

Maumer Rue smiled as if well pleased; yet the smile seemed a little burdened with sadness, too; and Bergan saw that it was followed by a look of extreme wistfulness.

"Can I do anything for you?" he asked, kindly.

"Nothing, master,—unless—if it is not asking too much,—and if you would not mind the touch of an old woman's fingers, that have to serve her instead of eyes, I could get so much clearer an idea of your looks,—” and she finished the sentence by raising her hand significantly toward his face.

Bergan was much moved. "Of course I should not mind," said he, drawing near to her;—"examine me as closely as you like. It would be strange indeed if there were anything unpleasant to me in the touch of hands that have done so much for my mother!"

"It's easy to see that you are Miss Eleanor's son, you have just her kind, pleasant ways," responded the blind woman, gratefully. "He is a little taller than you, Master Harry," she continued, turning toward the Major, as she laid her hand on Bergan's head,—“yes, just a little taller, though not much."

"All the better for that," remarked the Major, parenthetically, "the Bergans must not degenerate."

Maumer Rue went on, without noticing the interruption; passing her fingers lightly over Bergan's features, as she spoke. "His brow is square and full, like yours, and he has the same straight nose; but his eyes are not so deep-set, nor his eyebrows so heavy. His jaw is like yours, too,—the set, square jaw of the Bergans,—but his mouth is more like Miss Eleanor's:—a sweet, pleasant mouth *she* had, the mouth of the Habershams, her mother's family. Yet it could be firm enough, too, when there was need; our Miss Eleanor had plenty of character. And I'm right glad to see that you are so much like her; you couldn't resemble any one better or handsomer."

She made a slight pause, and then added, in a half-humorous way,—“I reckon she couldn't give you any spice of the ‘black Bergan temper,’ as she had none of it herself.”

“I am afraid she did,” answered Bergan, laughing, yet coloring, too; “and many a scrape it has gotten me into, before now. But I hope that I am learning to control it a little.”

“I don't see why you should,” broke in the Major, gruffly. “The Bergan temper is an heir-loom to be proud of; it identifies the breed. It has run in the blood from time immemorial. A Bergan without it—that is, a male, of course a woman counts for nothing—would be no Bergan at all.”

“You say true, Master Harry,” rejoined Rue, composedly; “it's always run in the blood, and heated it more than was good for it, many a time. Yet, now and then, there has been a Bergan who has learned how to keep it under, and been all the better for doing it. You surely must recollect what a mild, kind gentleman your father was, young as you were when he died; and I've heard say that there never was a truer Bergan, or one more respected all the country through.”

The Major made a grimace, and muttered something

unintelligible, in a tone half of acquiescence, half of irritation.

Rue turned again to Bergan. "You have been very patient with an old woman's talk, and an old woman's infirmity," said she, with a kind of natural dignity,—“I will not trouble you any longer. Good night, and thank you, Master—what name shall I say?”

Bergan hesitated, and looked doubtfully at his uncle.

"He says his name is Bergan," explained the Major, shortly; "but I have given him to understand that he is to be known by my own name, Harry, while he stays here."

Rue shook her head. "There can be but one Master Harry for me," she said quietly,—“the one that I nursed as a babe and petted as a child, the one that I have lived with so many years, and who has always been so kind to me—kinder even than he has been to himself. So please let me call him Master Bergan; but, of course, the rest of the people will give him any name that you say."

"Of course they will," returned the Major, haughtily, "or I'll know the reason why. As for you, maumer, I shall let you do as you please; you've had your own way too long to be balked of it now. But take care that the others don't hear and imitate you,—or you know what they'll get."

"Thank you, Master Harry," replied Rue, as gratefully as if the assent had been more graciously given,—“you are always good to your poor old maumer. Good night." And she turned to go.

But on the threshold, she paused, and lifted her sightless face toward the dim night-sky, across which dark clouds were swiftly scudding.

"Master Harry," said she, suddenly, "do you remember how I told you, six months ago, that the Bergan star was set, and how angry you were?"

"Yes, yes, I remember," exclaimed the Major, hoarsely and eagerly,—“what of it?"

She slowly raised her right hand, and pointed skyward, with a strange, intent, watchful expression in her uplifted face. "See! it is rising!" said she; "it comes up through the clouds,—they try to hold it back, but they cannot,—it grows brighter! it rises higher!—ah!"—drawing her breath hard and gaspingly,—“it stops—it goes down again!—the clouds cover it!—it is—No! it is *not* gone! it shines faintly behind the clouds—it breaks through—slowly, slowly, slowly,—it rises! it rises!”

Yielding, half-unconsciously, to the powerful influence of the blind woman's rapt, ecstatic manner, Bergan had drawn near to her, and now saw, with surprise, a single star shining for a moment through the rifts of the clouds. Glancing at the Major, whom he had before seen to be hanging with breathless interest upon the words of the old negress, he perceived that his eyes were fixed upon it also, with a gaze that was half-awed, half-triumphant. He knew not what to think.

Maunder Rue still stood in the same commanding attitude, with raised hand, and intent, uplooking face. Suddenly, her arm fell by her side; her head drooped on her breast; the majesty that had informed her pose and gesture went out like an expiring flame; she shivered, tottered, and would have fallen but for the Major's prompt support. Without a word, he guided her safely to the door of her cabin.

Coming back, he reseated himself at the table, which had been cleared of everything but the bottles and glasses, and hastily poured out and swallowed some raw brandy. Then he remarked, in a half-explanatory and half-apologetic tone,—

"She enjoys the reputation of a seer, or prophetess, among the negroes; and I really think she has some faith in it herself. Certainly, she seems to have strange visions now and then; and some of her predictions have come true; I confess she puzzles even me. At all events, she is

the best and most faithful old creature that ever lived. She was born on the estate, brought up in the Hall with my father and his sisters, shared their education, is thoroughly steeped in the family traditions, duly infected with the family pride, and entirely devoted to the family interests. She is the only person that I allow to do pretty much as she pleases; her long and faithful services to my father, Eleanor, and myself, deserve that much, I think. And really, she is of great use to me; I scarcely know what I should do without her. The negroes all believe her to be a hundred years old—undoubtedly she is past ninety—and that, together with her reputation as a prophetess, gives her great power over them, and saves me a heap of trouble in managing them. She has very good judgment, too, in many things; I frequently take her advice, and never yet had occasion to regret doing so. Indeed, it was chiefly at her instigation and entreaty that I had made up my mind, as I told you, to write to your mother about sending me one of her sons.”

He paused for a moment, and then asked, in a careless tone, but with a quick, keen glance at his nephew, from under his shaggy brows,—“Did you see that star?”

“Yes,” answered Bergan. “It was a curious coincidence.”

“Hum—very,” returned his uncle, evidently not quite satisfied with this view of the matter. But he said no more.

The conversation now turned into various other channels. It touched for a brief space upon the indefatigable quoter of proverbs whom Bergan had overtaken on his way to the Hall; and whom the Major declared to be the only living representative of one of the oldest and most influential families in the county. He had been reared in affluence, had been educated in Europe, and had inherited a large fortune and a fine estate. But he had early fallen into bad habits,—not so much from viciousness of temper

and taste, as from weakness of will and consequent inability to resist temptation,—had run a short, rapid career of folly, extravagance, and dissipation, in which he had frittered away his inheritance, and so had gradually sunken into his present state of semi-vagabondage. He lived, by sufferance, in a little cabin, on one corner of the estate which he had formerly owned. From his wholesale shipwreck of fortune, position, will, energy, and hope, he had saved but one thing—his love of proverbs. It had even grown stronger in proportion as other things wasted and failed,—like a plant striking deep root into soil enriched by the decay of many sister plants. He had learned several languages solely for the sake of their proverbs; he had even been seen to hesitate and waver long between the diverse, but powerful, attractions of a bottle of ardent spirits and a dingy, old collection of saws, when but one came within the compass of his purse; and he was known far and wide by the *sobriquet* of “Proverb Dick.” His real name was Richard Causton.

In listening to this history, Bergan could not but be struck by the curiously discriminating character of the Major’s animadversion. He had little, or nothing, to say in disapproval of the depraved and ungovernable appetite for strong drink which, it was easy to see, had played so important part in ruining poor Richard Causton; while he could find no words strong enough to express his bitter contempt for the flabby will, the pitiable irresolution, and the insane extravagance, which had joined hands with that appetite for his complete destruction. Tender, as a mother to her babe, over the fault which he knew himself to possess (if he secretly acknowledged it to be a fault), Major Bergan was merciless to the weaknesses from which he was saved by a hardier will and a more energetic temperament.

But as the evening wore on, and the brandy slowly worked its way up to the stronghold of his brain, the Ma-

jor's talk grew discursive, profane, and incoherent ; until Bergan, shocked and pained, and anxious to escape from the mortifying spectacle, pleaded fatigue, and begged permission to retire. Jip was accordingly summoned, and he was conducted to a little, low room under the cottage roof, where his portmanteau had been bestowed, and some little provision made for his comfort.

Here Bergan quickly threw himself on the bed, to find, for the first time in his life, that it was one thing to woo the fair maiden Sleep, and another to win her. Recollections of his western home, of his mother, of the ancestral traditions on which his childish imagination had fed, of his youthful studies and aspirations, of his recent journey, and the disappointment in which it had ended, mingled with half-conceived plans and half-acknowledged hopes,—a vague, changeable, teasing, tireless procession of thoughts and images,—filed slowly through his mind, compelling his reluctant gaze, and blocking up every avenue to Slumberland. And if, for an instant, the vexing march stopped, and the importunate images began to waver and blend, sounds of stamping feet, of jingling glass, of muttered oaths and sentences, or two or three half-sung, half-shouted lines of a drunken ditty, coming up from below, startled him once more into wakefulness, and told him that his uncle's solitary debauch was not yet ended. It was already gray dawn when, worn out with restlessness, he fell into a brief slumber, and dreamed that old Rue, with the Bergan star in her hand, was beckoning him to follow her over a dreary, desolate country, full of briers and pitfalls, wherein he was so constantly entangled that, in spite of his best endeavors, he could never get any nearer to her. Turning suddenly, she flashed the star into his eyes, and—oh, horror of horrors!—he was blind!

Starting up, all in a tremble, he found that the risen sun was shining full in his face, through the uncurtained window. It was morning.

IV.

A GOODLY HERITAGE.

EARLY as was the hour, Bergan found the table already laid for breakfast in the room below, where he was soon joined by the Major. He brought with him (besides a noticeable odor of brandy), a cordial morning greeting, and a temper which, though by no means urbane, had a certain flavor of bluff good nature, in pleasing contrast with his extreme irritability of the preceding evening. Encouraged by these and similar signs of a clearer mental atmosphere, Bergan ventured to mention his uncle Godfrey, and to remark that he had been charged with a letter to him from his mother, which he must take an early opportunity to deliver.

"Eh! what?" asked the Major, laying down his knife and fork, with the look and tone of a man who doubts the evidence of his own senses.

Bergan quietly repeated his words.

The Major's face grew dark, and his eyebrows met in a heavy frown. "I shall take it mighty hard of you, if you do," said he, sternly and gloomily. "I tell you, Harry, he is no Bergan at all, and he ought not to be treated like one. Eleanor would never have written to him, nor desired you to visit him, if she had known the true state of affairs;—you can safely take that for granted, and act accordingly. Besides," he went on, after a slight pause, "it is only fair to warn you that any one who goes from Bergan Hall over to Oakstead (that's what he calls his place), doesn't come back again,—with my consent. There's no relation, nor

commerce, nor sympathy, nor liking, between the two places; and there never can be any while I live,—nor after I am dead, either, if I can help it. So just put that matter out of your head, Harry, and say no more about it.”

Bergan looked down, and the color rose to his brow. Without seeking to know the merits of the quarrel between his two uncles, he nevertheless felt that the abject submission, the complete surrender of principle and will, expected of him by Major Bergan, was simply impossible; and he began to wonder if it were not his wisest course to place himself at once on tenable ground, by saying that, while he should always be glad of his uncle's advice, and ready to give all due and respectful consideration to his wishes, yet, in matters involving questions of right and duty, the final appeal must needs be to his own conscience. Something of this sort was upon his lips, when the Major spoke again, and in a more amiable tone.

“I am really sorry, for your sake, Harry, that things are just as they are,” said he. “Of course, it is not agreeable to you to run thus unexpectedly against a family feud;—I really ought to have written Eleanor about it, but I thought to spare her the knowledge of her half-brother's disgrace. Besides, as Godfrey is our nearest neighbor, it might be pleasant to be on visiting terms, if he and his were only the right sort of company to keep.”

“I think he has children near my own age,” remarked Bergan.

“Not now. His two eldest died a few years ago.”

“Ah, yes; I remember hearing of it when I was in college.”

“He has but one left—a daughter,” pursued the Major. “A pretty, bright little thing she was, too, as a child; I was really quite fond of her, and she used to spend half her time here,—that is, in the old Hall;—and Maumer Rue almost idolized her, because she fancied that she was something like what Eleanor was at her age. She even used to

run away and come over here, after the trouble began ; but I reckon they must have found it out, and put a stop to it." And the Major ground his teeth at the recollection, as if he owed his brother an especial grudge on this very head. "However," he went on, "it is better so ; for though I could never have found it in my heart to be unkind to the child,—so fond of me as she was, too !—yet I want nothing to do with anybody, or anything, that belongs to Godfrey ; and so I am glad, on the whole, that she stopped coming. Doubtless, she will soon merge the name of Bergan into Smith, or Brown, or something equally desirable ; and as Godfrey has no son, to bear his patronymic and carry on his business, we may hope that there will be an end of *them*."

The last words were spoken with ineffable contempt. Then, suddenly rising, as if to dismiss the subject, the Major remarked, with an entire change of tone and manner :—

"But I must not sit here chatting any longer, for I suspect that Ben—that's my head driver—is waiting for instructions. Will you come with me, or do you prefer to amuse yourself about home ?"

"I will go with you, uncle, if you are willing."

"Both willing and glad. Come on."

Bergan followed his uncle out into the quadrangle,—here called the "street,"—and found it to be, for the most part, silent and deserted. The cabins, many of which, on the evening previous, had been brightened by a little gleam of firelight within, or vivified by moving figures, were now closed and locked, the occupants being away at work in the fields. They were all neatly whitewashed ; and they stood well apart from each other, leaving room for little gardens between, where vegetables, and, occasionally, flowers, were growing. Here and there, too, a pig rooted and grunted in a rude sty ; or hens and chickens fluttered and cackled, in their busy, enlivening fashion, around the door.

One of the buildings, of considerable size, and two stories high, where several women and children, with peculiar haggard, heavy, listless, and withal resigned faces, were lying or sitting around the porch, Bergan easily recognized as the infirmary. Another, seemingly stuffed with babies and young children, under the charge of several half-grown girls and one superannuated old woman, he knew to be the day-nursery; for the safe bestowal of the infant population of the quarter, during their mothers' absence in the fields. Here, Maumer Rue seemed to be making a visit of inspection; though invisible herself, the slow tones of her voice, exhorting one of the young nurses to greater watchfulness, sounded distinctly from within; and becoming quickly aware of the approach of her master and his guest, she came to the door, and made them a stately courtesy, as they passed.

Quite apart from the quarter, yet within sight, stood a cabin of especially rude and forlorn aspect; the open door of which disclosed a strong stake driven into the ground in its centre, and divers rusty chains, handcuffs, padlocks, *et cætera*, hanging round its sides. This was the prison. Human justice being thus provided with a fitting abode, Bergan involuntarily looked around in search of a corresponding dwelling for Heaven's mercy, in the shape of a little cross-tipped church or chapel,—but saw none.

Major Bergan first stopped at the threshing-mill, where Engine (that is to say "Engineer") Jack, a remarkably intelligent negro,—and an exceedingly black one as well,—was waiting to bring to his master's notice certain slight repairs necessary to the machinery. While the needful discussion was going on, Bergan looked around him, the better to understand the topography of the place.

He observed that Bergan Hall, the roof of which he saw afar off, rising among the trees, was situated upon a considerable elevation,—a sort of bluff, overlooking a small inlet, or arm of the sea. To this circumstance, Major

Bergan owed his ability to live upon his plantation throughout the year, instead of fleeing therefrom, like most of his class, at the approach of summer. For, just when the home-scenery takes on its most tender and fascinating grace,—when the rice-fields are green as the meadows of paradise,—when the temple-like oak-glades are most beautiful with gentle gloom and glinting sunshine,—when every thicket has its garland of bloom, and every tree has its clinging, flowering vine,—when the sweet-smelling pine-woods are glittering with the gorgeous coloring, and melodious with the multifarious voice, of thousands of birds and insects;—just then, the rice-planter has to flee for his life from its final, treacherous charm—the soft-shining mist, the deadly malaria, that creeps up at night from the marshes, and covers the land like a sea. If he lingers for but one ramble in the fair, moon-lighted, and moss-festooned avenues, through that silver haze, fever walks by his side under the grand arches, and death waits for him at the end of the alluring vistas.

From this terror and this necessity, the owner of Bergan Hall was free. His vast plantation stretched across the border-line which divides the pestilential rice-swamps from the healthful sea-islands; one extremity touching the river, and the other the ocean. At one time, its chief revenue was derived from the far-famed sea-island cotton, to the production of which its sea-board portion was well-adapted, but as that crop declined, and the rice-crop rose, in value, its neglected swamp-lands were gradually reclaimed and brought under cultivation; and were now the most valuable portion of the estate. Too remote from Bergan Hall to poison it, or its vicinity, with their malaria, they were yet quite near enough for necessary superintendence.

The negro quarter lay somewhat lower than the Hall. On its left, the ground sloped gradually down to a little creek; where lay several flat-boats loaded with rice, to

show what had been the goal of the negro procession of the previous evening. Along the opposite bank ran a dark fringe of pines.

Horses were now brought. The one assigned to Bergan was a superb blooded filly, full of life and fire. While he stood taking delighted note of her many fine points, she sniffed round him in half-wild, half-curious fashion,—now starting quickly back, now timidly drawing near,—and ended by frankly putting her nose in his hand, as if in token of amity. Nor had he been long on her back, ere he felt, with an electric thrill of pleasure, that perfect sympathy between horse and rider, that singular blending of their identity, which is the purest delight of horsemanship, and best explains the fable of the Centaur.

“How do you like her?” asked his uncle, at this juncture.

“Exceedingly,” replied Bergan, with enthusiastic emphasis. “I think that I never rode anything more admirable.”

“Henceforth, then, she belongs to you. And never mind the thanks,—I am really glad to hand her over to a fitting master. She is too much given to dancing and frolicking for my use,—my sober-paced stallion meets my wants a great deal better;—consequently, Vic—that’s her name, short for Victoria,—Vic stands in the stable, eating her head and kicking her heels off, for the greater part of the time. She will be much happier in the hands of a master young enough to sympathize with her.”

Bergan could not fail to be delighted with a gift so generous and so timely; bestowed, too, with a delicacy of manner, an appearance of asking a favor instead of conferring one, in strong contrast with his uncle’s wonted bluntness. Visions of long, solitary rides of exploration rose fascinatingly before him. Nor would he suffer his pleasure to be alloyed by any insidious doubt lest the gift might some day take the form of an unpleasant obligation.

The road ran along the bank of the creek, passing divers fields under cultivation, and divers others long "turned out,"—that is, exhausted, and left to lapse back into their primitive pine-barrenness. In the course of an hour, the two gentlemen came upon a second negro quarter, considerably larger than the first, but with the same general characteristics, even to the threshing-mill. This one, however, ran by water power, instead of steam.

The horses were here left in charge of a negro, while the gentlemen walked over to the rice fields. They soon came into view, stretching, almost as far as the eye could reach, along the bank of a broad, turbid river. Bergan speedily became much interested in their complicated system of dykes, ditches, canals, and gates; as well as in watching the dusky laborers, both men and women, that were busy therein. Leaving details for results, however, he could not but be impressed with the fact that a vast amount of hard work was annually done, and a rich and remunerative crop annually reaped. Plainly, Major Bergan was an energetic, skilful manager.

On his part, the Major was greatly pleased with his nephew's intelligent interest, and predicted, more than once, that he would make a rice-planter of him, in due time, who would show his neighbors "what was what."

The sun was half way down the western slope, when the uncle and nephew returned to the cottage. Dinner over, the Major civilly expressed his regret that he was unexpectedly called to another part of the plantation. Bergan could accompany him; or—not to disappoint him of his promised visit to the old Hall—he could get the keys of Maumer Rue, and explore it by himself.

Bergan eagerly caught at the latter alternative. Nor, to do him justice, was the Major at all displeased thereby. Without troubling himself to analyze his own emotions, he yet felt an unconquerable aversion to the task of showing his nephew through the deserted home of his forefathers.

Though little accustomed to care for the opinions or the feelings of others, he foresaw an inevitable mortification in looking with Bergan upon the ruin and desolation for which he knew himself to be so largely responsible; since, if he had not invited the ravages of time, he had put forth no hand to stay them. Perhaps this feeling was strong enough, even, to lend to the business that called him away, an imperative aspect which it might otherwise have lacked.

Bergan, on his part, was well content to dispense with his uncle's guidance. Not only would his presence be a constraint upon his own irrepressible emotions of sadness, regret, and, possibly, indignation; but there would be a rare, subtile charm in wandering alone through precincts at once so familiar and so strange, in finding out for himself (or led only by the shadowy image of his maiden mother), spots hallowed by the tender touch of oldtime joys and sorrows, and nooks and corners darkened not more by mould and cobwebs than by the clinging dust of immemorial family tradition.

First, however, Major Bergan requested his companionship as far as the stable. There they found a bright looking boy, somewhat older than Jip, who had just finished rubbing down the filly of which Bergan had so lately become the master, and now stood regarding the result with great apparent satisfaction.

"Well, Brick," said the Major, sternly, "I hope you've done better than you did last time."

"Yes, massa, she done berry fine, I'se sure,—spec' I put a right smart hour on her. Look a dar, now, don' she shine?"

The Major examined her carefully, and finding nothing to fault, was silent. It was not his way to waste words in commendation. He merely turned from the horse to the negro, and asked, pointing to Bergan,—

"You see that young gentleman?"

"Yis, massa; sartin, massa." And Brick made an embarrassed bow, uncertain whither this conversation might tend.

"Well, that's Vic's master, and yours. It's your business to take care of her, and wait on him,—that is, do everything he tells you. Hereafter, you are to go to him for orders."

And quickly mounting his own horse, the Major rode off, without waiting for thanks or comments.

Bergan stood looking doubtfully at his new acquisition. Property of this kind gave him a novel sensation; he could not tell, on the instant, whether he liked it or no. Nevertheless, he recognized the inexpediency of discussing the matter with the dusky chattel himself; who, to represent him fairly, seemed in nowise displeased with his change of owners. He had opened his eyes a trifle wider at his sudden transfer, and uttered a mechanical, "Yis, massa,"—that was all. He now stood, tattered hat in hand, waiting for orders. Bergan was somewhat disconcerted to find that he had none to give. Finally, he asked,—

"What is your name?"

"Rubric, sah. But dey mos'ly calls me Brick."

"Ah, yes, I see. And your family name?"

"Hain't got no family, sah."

"Your father's name, I mean."

"Nebber had any fader, sah. He sold down souf, fore I's born."

"Your second name, then."

"Same's yours, massa, I s'pose."

"Hum—How old are you?"

Brick scratched his head reflectively. "Don' jes' know, massa, 'zactly. Spec' bout—bout—fifteen or—twenty, sah; jess 's massa likes."

Bergan bit his lip. Never had he met with such a spirit of accommodation.

"Well, Brick," he asked, after a moment, "if you had a half-holiday, now, what would you do with it?"

Brick's face grew radiant through all its dusk. "Go a-fishin', massa," he burst out, eagerly; "I jes' should!"

"Well, go fishing, then,—if you think you can be back by supper-time."

"Yis, massa. Tank you, massa." And Brick was off like an arrow from the string.

Bergan immediately sought out old Rue's cabin. Outwardly, it differed little from its neighbors; but its interior was not without evidences of thoughtful provision for the faithful old nurse's comfort. Having kindly answered all the questions that she chose to ask, in reference to "Miss Eleanor" and her western life, he made known his errand. She instantly took a key from her pocket, and was about to put it in his hand, when she suddenly drew back, exclaiming:—

"No, no, that will never do! I forgot. That is the key of the back door. You see, sir, I sometimes look into the Hall, and that way is most convenient."

"I assure you that it will serve me very well, too," replied Bergan. "It does not matter how I make my entrance."

Rue shook her head. "It is not fitting," said she, "that the son and heir of the house should first enter at the back, like a servant."

"The son, but not the heir," replied Bergan, smiling.

Rue turned quickly toward him. "Not the heir!" she exclaimed, as if greatly surprised. "And why not?"

The question was not easy to answer. Bergan could not say frankly, "Because such heirship must be bought at too high a price,—even the surrender of my profession, will, conscience, individuality." Nor did the answer present itself to his own mind in this definite form. He was conscious, at the moment, of nothing but a confused, hazy throng of doubts, fears, possibilities, and wishes.

Rue seemed quite satisfied with his silence. She turned to a bureau near by, and, after a little search, drew forth

a large, rusty key, which she handed him with a kind of solemnity.

"It has waited long," said she, "for the hand that should rightfully put it into the lock, and let light and hope once more into the old house. I thank the Lord that I live to see the day."

Bergan was too much touched to answer. He walked quickly to the front of the deserted mansion, cut the vines from the door, and put the key in the lock. At first, it opposed a stubborn resistance to his efforts; then, suddenly, the bolt yielded, the door turned slowly on its long-unused hinges, and he stood, with a beating heart, in his ancestral hall.

V.

WASTE PLACES.

HE was met by a swift gust of wind, so chill and vault-like, and hurrying past him with so woful a sigh, that it seemed like the rush of innumerable imprisoned ghosts, eagerly seizing upon the opportunity for escape. Involuntarily letting go the door, it fell to behind him with a clangor that reverberated loudly, for a moment, through the house, and then suddenly ceased, as if smothered in some remote corner by a lurking hand. The silence which followed was dreary and oppressive,—all the more, because Bergan, coming so suddenly from the outward sunshine, was altogether bedimmed by such density of gloom as brooded within, most of the windows being either darkened by blinds, or closed with heavy opaque shutters. For a single instant, he felt a thrill of unreasoning horror. The impenetrable gloom, the oppressive stillness, the damp, dead air (which might have come straight from the open mouth of a tomb), gave him a chill impression that he had committed sacrilege.

Quickly recovering himself, however, he again flung wide open the door, and fastened it back. By the light thus admitted, he easily found his way to a window at the other end of the hall, which he also opened. There was an immediate inward rush, not only of the sunny daylight, but of the sweet, warm air of the autumn afternoon, with its inevitable suggestions of tranquil sea, and tender sky, and slow-waving forest; quickly penetrating, he felt sure, to the uppermost corner of the long-deserted dwelling, and

scattering everywhere some healthful, purifying, enlivening influence.

He could now see that he stood in a wide and lofty entrance-hall, decorated with a profusion of carved wood-work ; panels, cornices, and casements, being ornamented with garlands of oaken roses, or quaint heads of animals, stiff as petrifications, and almost ebon-black with time and rubbing. The furniture consisted of a small table, a cumbersome cabinet, and ponderous, high-backed chairs, of the Elizabethan age, or perhaps earlier, brought from England, as heir-looms, by the first emigrant Bergan. There was also a tall, spectral clock, which, to Bergan's intense astonishment, suddenly began to fill the hall with a loud, monotonous tick, as if the march of time, long ago arrested in the deserted mansion, was now duly resumed :—doubtless the rusty wheels had been jarred into spasmodic motion by the violent closing of the door. By way of decoration, there were a few dingy pictures, in dark, carved frames ; and in two of the oaken panels hung complete suits of armor,—helmets, cuirasses, gorgets, greaves, and gauntlets,—memorials, not only of long-buried Bergans, but of long-vanished days.

Hesitating, for a moment, between two half-open doors, Bergan finally chose to enter the main parlor, a room full of a dusky, old-time grandeur. A piano stood between the windows, over the keys of which he ran his fingers, but found that its music had been imprisoned so long as to have grown hoarse and melancholy. So, doubtless, had that of the harp, which showed skeleton-like through its torn baize cover, and was flanked by a pile of music-books, the leaves of which were yellow with age. Odd, unweildy chairs, covered with faded silk damask and a rich coat of dust, kept solemn state in the dim corners ; ottomans and footstools, elaborately embroidered by forgotten fingers with birds, flowers, and other once cheerful devices, stood under the windows, or were scattered around the floor.

On the walls, in frames of tarnished magnificence, hung two or three pictures in worsted, the designs of which, like the hands that had wrought them, were now faded beyond recognition. Just in proportion as these things had once helped to brighten the room, they helped to make it more sombre now. Like the images of vanished joys, they were all the gloomier because once so glad. Looking upon them, Bergan was painfully impressed with the latent identity of gayety and grief. Only give them time enough, and they merge into the same dull neutral tint!

Bergan next glanced into a second parlor, a dusky ante-room, and a dining-room, but leaving these places undisturbed in their dim and dusty sanctity, as not of pressing interest, he made his way to the library, on the other side of the hall. It was a large and lofty room, set round with ancient book-cases, above and between which hung rows of portraits, in frames of oak and gilt. These represented the early forefathers and later worthies of the Bergan lineage,—some in knightly armor, with mailed hands clasping a gleaming sword-hilt; some in the rich array of the Tudor or the Stuart court, with laced and plumed hats under their arms; some in the red coats and top-boots of English squires, with a favorite horse or hound looking out from one corner of the picture; some in the huge horsehair wigs and ermined robes of the judge's bench; and others in the cocked hats and knee-breeches of the Revolution, or in the modern black coat and pantaloons, seated in arm-chairs, with their backs to a crimson curtain. There were also dames to match, with towers of lace and curls upon their heads, ruffs, farthingales, and all manner of obsolete finery.

Most of the faces had the austerity of aspect common to old portraits, as if time had delighted to bring into clearer view the hard, stern traits of character which the painter had dared but faintly to delineate, and had even then done his best to cover up with pleasant coloring, and a final coat

of lustrous varnish. Nowhere was this effect more striking than in the portrait of Sir Harry Bergan, earliest emigrant of the name, and father of the American line. The younger son of a noble English house, he had early fallen under the displeasure of a stern father, by reason of careless and spendthrift habits; and had finally been banished, in disgrace, to a small continental town, upon an allowance barely sufficient to keep body and soul together. Under this severe discipline,—smarting, too, with a rankling sense of injustice in the treatment that he had received,—his character underwent a complete transformation. His carelessness and extravagance, as well as the generosity and frankness of which they had been the rank, ill-trained outgrowth, fell from him like worn-out garments; he became bitter, morose, and dogged.

At this crisis, the sudden death of his mother placed him in possession of her own large fortune and family estate. Life once more opened before him; but no gentle affection called him back to the paternal neighborhood. On the contrary, he emigrated to Georgia, just then luminous with the career and the fame of General Oglethorpe; with the ambitious design of founding a Bergan lineage in the new world, which should equal, if not surpass, that of the old one. He bought a vast tract of land, and vigorously commenced the work of bringing it under cultivation; he distinguished himself both as soldier and citizen in the Spanish war and the colonial trials, and was knighted for his services; finally, he imported men and materials, and built Bergan Hall as nearly as was possible in the style of his early English home, and called it by the same name. The bricks, the tiles, the elaborate oak carvings, the door and window-frames, the furniture and decorations, the copies of ancestral portraits, were all brought from England, and put in their places by English artisans.

Scarcely was the work finished ere he died, bequeathing to his descendants, not only a vast estate, a splendid home,

and an illustrious name, but, by a still stronger law of heirship, certain marked traits of character hereditary in himself,—indomitable energy, dogged independence, strong family pride, and an occasional lunacy of rage, familiarly known as the “Black Bergan temper,” to which the race had been subject from time immemorial. These characteristics were to be traced, more or less distinctly through all the portraits of his successors; but in none did they seem to be so perfectly reproduced as in his present representative. In truth, Major Bergan might be regarded as the original Sir Harry over again; his harsh features and stern expression being shown in the old, time-darkened picture with a degree of prophetic accuracy little short of actual portraiture.

Other pictured faces there were, however, which time, still faithful to its work of bringing out the essential truth, had only touched into softer beauty. Such was the face of Eleanor, wife of Sir Harry; a woman of fair and noble presence, in the rich prime of her life, with a wise, strong, beautiful soul, shining out through her deep, soft eyes. Before this picture Bergan lingered long. Even in babyhood, his mother had resembled it strongly enough to make it seem most fitting that she should receive its name; and the likeness had so strengthened with years, that now, it might easily have passed for her portrait, painted from life.

Seeing how perfectly these twain of their ancestors were reflected in his mother and uncle, not only in features, but also in character, Bergan was suddenly seized with a nightmare of doubt and questioning. Was a man's good or evil, then, a mere matter of inheritance, an inevitable heirloom, handed down to him from a remote ancestry, by a more effectual law of transmission than has ever been established, in respect to more tangible property? If so,—if the defects and weaknesses, the depraved tastes and ungovernable passions, which characterized the father were

inevitably passed on to the son, and the son's son,—if the moral disease under which this man groaned, as well as the sweet temper which made that woman a household sunbeam, were to be surely traced back to their ancestor of a hundred years ago; what became of individual worth, individual shame, and individual accountability?

Bergan shrank from the apparently inevitable conclusion. He felt, with an unutterable horror, its snaky coils tightening around him, squeezing the breath out of every noble aim and aspiration. He could only escape from it by an appeal from his reason to his consciousness.

"If," he asked himself, "I should now take that grim picture from the wall, and thrust it into the fire, in revenge for the pain which it has given me, should I not know, despite all reasoning to the contrary, that I—I alone, and not that bearded Sir Harry, was responsible for the foolish act? Certainly, I should; for whatever else he may have sent down to me, he did not give me either my will or my conscience. These are my own, and never Bergan of them all had them before me!" And he drew a long breath of relief.

His attention was now directed to the portrait of a young girl, at the end of the second row, nearest the window. It had an odd, illusive resemblance to some one that he had known,—a singular likeness in unlikeness, which puzzled while it attracted him. All at once, capturing the fleeting, familiar expression, as it were, by a swift side-glance, he recognized it as that portrait of his mother in her youth, of which Major Bergan had spoken. He stood gazing upon it long and earnestly, yet with a strange, undefinable feeling of sadness, too. For this bright, young being, with the smooth brow, the arch, dimpled face, and the unawakened soul dreaming at the depths of the soft eyes, was, after all, a stranger to him,—a being that he had never known, and never could know, any more than if she had been laid years ago under the sod, and her sweet sub-

stance gradually transformed into violets and daisies. He went back to the picture of Lady Eleanor, and felt, with a thrill of gladness, that he had found again the mother that he seemed, for a brief space, to have lost.

He now turned from the pictures to the book-cases, and found them to contain a heterogeneous collection of ancient and modern volumes, carelessly ranged upon the shelves, without reference either to age or theme. Latin and English classics stood shoulder to shoulder; law and poetry were harmoniously cheek by jowl; divinity and science amiably helped each other to stand upright; history, philosophy, morality, and controversy, met on the same plane, and sunk their differences under one uniform coat of dust. Geography that read like fiction, geology that had no interest except to the antiquarian, and infidelity that had not a peg left to stand upon, were huddled together in one corner, and (no doubt to their utter amazement) helped, in these latter days, to point the same moral.

Growing oppressed, at last, with the sight of so much hopelessly shelved thought, so many pages bearing the prints of a long succession of fingers now crumbled into dust, Bergan turned back to the hall, mounted the stair-case, and glanced into two or three of the chambers. He found in all faded carpets, ancient bureaus, high-post bedsteads, shadow-haunted hangings, a thick coating of dust, and a heavy, breathless scent which, it seemed to him, death must needs have left there, in his oldtime visits. Indeed, he could almost have believed that the last occupant of each dusky cavern of a bed had stiffened into clay therein, and been left to choke the air, and coat the furniture, with his own mouldering substance. No lighter dust, he thought, could have made the atmosphere so thick, or caused him to draw his breath so heavily.

Opening the last door in the gallery, Bergan was startled to find a room with every appearance of recent occupancy. Not a speck of dust dimmed the carpet or the

furniture ; the curtains and the bed-drapery stirred lightly with the breeze from a half-open window ; the soft pillows seemed waiting for the head that had dreamed upon them last night ; a chair, with a shawl thrown carelessly over the back, stood where it must needs have been left a moment ago ; an open workbox showed a suggestive confusion of spools of silk and bits of ribbon and worsted ; a vase of flowers adorned the mantel ; and a little white glove lay on the toilet-table, among brushes and scent-bottles, and was reflected in a small, bright mirror. Bergan hastily drew back, feeling intuitively that he had intruded upon a maiden's bed-chamber, keeping still the perfume of her sweet breath and happy thoughts.

Yet—the bed-linen, how strangely yellow!—the shawl, how dim and faded!—the flowers, how withered! He advanced again ; he began to understand that the maiden who had dreamed on that pillow, whose hand had left its dainty mould in that glove, the sweetness of whose virgin breath still lingered in the room with the scent of the withered rosebuds, went out from it years ago,—a bride,—to be known thenceforth as wife and mother,—*his* mother ! His eyes grew moist ; one by one he touched the little possessions left behind with her girlhood, striving thus to come a little closer to the fair, shy image, that moved him with such unutterable tenderness, yet seemed so far beyond his ken. Reverently, at last, he closed the door, as upon a still, white, smiling corpse, at once ineffably beautiful and ineffably sad.

But who had cared for this one room so tenderly, while all the rest of the house had been left to go to ruin ? The answer was plain. Old Rue, whose love for her young mistress was half a worship, had taken a sorrowful pleasure in keeping the room (with such help as she could easily command) in the exact state in which it had been left.

Bergan was in no mood for further exploration. He made his way back to the entrance-hall, and sat down in

one of the antique chairs. He was not quite ready for the instant transition into the outward sunshine. His heart was too heavy. The ancestral home was only an ancestral tomb. Surrounded by memorials of the old state and splendor of Bergan Hall, he felt all the more keenly its present desolation and decay. Remembering the noble Bergan lineage, he was humiliated to the dust by the thought of its present representative.

And here, first, his uncle's offer rose before him in the dazzling garments of temptation. Was it, after all, an ignoble ambition to lift the family name out of the dust, to restore the family home, fill it again with social life and warmth, and make it the centre of purer, more refining, and more elevating influences than ever before? Was it not better than any mere personal ambition? Might it not be just the place which he was meant to fill, and which, if he declined to take it, would be left empty? From questions he went on to answers; and his thoughts shaped out a tempting vision of Bergan Hall restored, re-vivified. Light steps and rustling garments went up and down the broad staircase,—his mother sat smiling in her old room,—voices of children echoed through the large, sunshiny parlors,—guests came and went,—he himself sat in the library, crowned with honors as with years, and—

He was recalled to the present and the actual by a low rumble of thunder. The sunshine had faded from the sky; clouds were rolling up from the west; he hastened back to the cottage through the first drops of the rain.

The evening passed much like its predecessor. When, at last, he went up to his room, leaving his uncle to the dear companionship of his bottle and glass, he found it half-flooded with water from a newly sprung leak in the roof. Hastily declining the Major's hesitating offer of a share in his own apartment, he begged permission to quarter himself in the old Hall.

Major Bergan set down his glass, and looked at him

with a mixture of wonder and admiration. "Certainly, Harry, if you are in earnest about it," said he. "But I must say that you are a brave fellow to choose to sleep alone in an old ruin like that,—haunted, too, the negroes say. But are you sure that you can find a room there any less leaky than your present one?"

"Quite sure. I noticed two or three, on the south side, which seemed to be in excellent condition."

"Very well; take your choice, and make yourself as comfortable as you can. Brick is under your orders, of course; and Maumer Rue will send you out one of the women, with what linen is needed. Good night."

The Major remained standing at the door, till he saw, first, a wandering gleam of light through the crevices of the old house, and then the steady beam of a candle, shining from an upper window.

"A light in Eleanor's room!—I never expected to see that again!" he murmured, and went back to his bottle, to drink all the deeper for some unwontedly sad and remorseful thoughts.

Meanwhile, Bergan had not once dreamed of appropriating that maiden sanctuary. He had merely chosen the room next to it; and the door between being transiently opened for better ventilation, Major Bergan had seen his light through the designated window.

It was not an easy task to make his dusty, mouldy room even tolerably habitable, but it was finally achieved; and, dismissing Brick, Bergan laid his head on his pillow, with a real satisfaction in being, at last, domiciled under his ancestral roof.

VI.

THE DAY OF TEMPTATION.

TWO days of drizzling rain followed, and did their best to make the black roof and mouldy walls of Bergan Hall look more cheerless than ever. But a counteracting influence was busy within. An energetic young spirit was rapidly organizing a home for itself in one corner; turning the shadows out of nooks where they had lain so long as almost to have established a pre-emption right, and making short work with dust, mould, and dead air. And, in some inexplicable way, the whole house seemed to catch the pleasant infection, and to be faintly astir with life. A passer-by of delicate instincts would have seen at once that the long lease of silence and emptiness had expired. And in truth, it would have been strange if a dwelling so old—so long familiar with human affairs and interests, the very timbers of which must have been oozy with the exhalations of a long succession of joys and sorrows—had not shown itself ready to sympathize with every passing phase of life, and especially to welcome back to its empty old bosom a fresh, young, beating heart.

That it did so, Bergan felt intuitively. In return, he did what he could to vivify with his single personality its whole wide indoor world. Having received unlimited discretionary powers from his uncle, in regard to choice of rooms and furniture, as well as the most unrestrained privilege of exploration, he went from room to room, ransacking and arranging, here picking up a quaintly carved chair,

and there an absurdly contorted little table, and setting wide open doors and windows wherever he could find a reasonable excuse for doing so. He even mounted to the garret, a great twilight-hall, stored with the lumber of many vanished generations, and dived into nooks of dingiest obscurity, with the eager zeal of a discoverer; coming forth covered with dust and cobwebs, and laden with spoils. File upon file of yellow papers, having a possible interest as family annals, a curiously gnarled and twisted genealogical tree, a dust-choked flute, several Spanish songs in manuscript, a discolored sketch-book, and a quaint old secretary, from the innumerable pigeon-holes of which sprang a whole colony of alarmed mice,—these were among the treasures that he unearthed, and transferred to his own room for examination or use. Every hour, the home-feeling grew upon him. Despite the gray and dripping sky, and the disconsolate, water-soaked earth, these days had their own peculiar illumination and charm. Oldness and newness combined to produce one rich—albeit, a little heavy—atmosphere of enjoyment.

Occasionally, his uncle came to watch his progress, and favor him with half-serious, half-jocular commentary. He was both interested and amused to observe how readily the new inmate fitted himself into his surroundings, and what talent he displayed in organizing various crude and chaotic elements into one harmonious whole. By turns he adapted, invented, or altered, until his room presented an aspect of pleasantness, as well as an array of conveniences, in striking contrast with the rude accommodations of the cottage, and even with the oldtime appliances that had served former occupants. His uncle wondered and admired even while he shook his head over the un-Bergan-like trait, and questioned if, after all, it were not a sign of degeneracy. This doubt wellnigh culminated in conviction when, on the afternoon of the second day, in a lull of the storm, he discovered his nephew calmly seated astride the high ridge-

pole, with a bundle of shingles and a pocketful of nails, stopping the leaks with which the long rain and his visits to the garret had made him acquainted; and accompanying his work with a very sweet and deftly executed whistle.

"That settles the question, Harry," he shouted to the amateur carpenter, a smile and a frown struggling for supremacy on his upturned face. "There never was a Bergan, from first to last, who could have done that!"

"Do not speak so disrespectfully of our common ancestors, uncle! As if they had not the use of their hands!"

"Humph! It's plain that you have the use of yours, and of your head, too! How in the world did you reach that dizzy altitude?"

Bergan laughed. "'Where there's a will there's a way.' What should you say to the chimney?"

"Nonsense! How *did* you get up there?"

"I really cannot answer that question as it stands. There is a mistake in the terms."

"You rascal! what do you mean?"

"I did not 'get up;' I came down." And Bergan glanced at a great oak-bough, swinging full ten feet above his head.

The Major uttered a cry of admiration. "You *are* a Bergan, and no mistake!" he cried, emphasizing the statement with an oath. "You've got the real, old, brave Bergan stuff in you, Harry, and I'm proud of you, in spite of your tinkering. But that bough is now out of your reach; you cannot come down by that route."

"A new one will be more interesting. And the chimney has a most capacious throat; the builders must have contemplated the passage of other things than smoke."

"Harry! you'll break your neck! Don't you dare to come down till I send you a ladder! At the same time, I'll order the carpenter to finish up that job, if it must be done."

"He will be too late, uncle; I am just laying the last shingle."

"Speak lower, you scamp! lest the old portraits under your feet should hear you and blush."

"Their thanks would be much more to the point—especially Sir Harry's," coolly replied Bergan. "Two hours ago, the water from this very leak was pouring in a stream down his long ancestral nose; you would have said the picture had an influenza."

The Major emitted a sound between a laugh and a growl, and vanished.

Poor Brick was even more scandalized by his young master's plebeian readiness with his hands. The very ease with which Bergan performed his self-imposed, and, for the most part, unaccustomed tasks, misled the dusky spectator. To be sure, Brick was a little comforted to observe that those agile hands knew the trick of the ivory piano-keys full well, and could evolve soulful melody from the flute, that they were not ignorant of the mysteries of sketching, and betrayed a scholarly familiarity with books and papers, pen and ink; yet he doubted if even these gracious accomplishments could wash from them the stain of that dreadful manual labor in which they were erewhile engaged,—the only redeeming feature of which was that it was not done for bread.

Nevertheless, Brick loved his young master with all his heart. He had succumbed at once to the rare charm of Bergan's manner,—so grave and thoughtful for his years, yet so richly illuminated, at times, with soft gleams of humor, and always so genuinely kind. He followed him like his shadow; he could scarcely be happy out of his presence; and notwithstanding his own inward struggles with doubt and mortification, he continually held him up to the admiration of the quarter in the strongest language of encomium that he could command, as a "bery high-tone gemman, and jes' de bes' massa dat ebber stepped foot on de old place."

The appearance of this "high-toned gentleman" on the roof, in the humble rôle of carpenter, was, therefore, a rude shock to Brick's finer sensibilities. He watched him from the ground below, groaning simultaneously over probable fractures to his limbs, and certain damage to his reputation. It gave him some consolation to find that the Major was inclined to treat the matter in a jocular rather than a serious light; and he was profoundly impressed with his hearty admiration of the gymnastic feat with which the questionable performance had opened. That, at least, his own dusky friends of the quarter could understand and approve.

Brick was still further reassured by Maumer Rue, to whom he stood in the relation of grandson. On being consulted, she had replied, loftily,—

"A Bergen can do what he pleases, child. He is not obliged to walk by rule and measure, like people whose pedigree stops with their grandfathers. If a king chooses to make a box, a barrel, or a piece of furniture, for his own use, it is not a meanness, but an eccentricity." And the long word not only floored Brick's last remaining doubt, but furnished him with the means of silencing other critics. In view of carpentry and tinkering, dignified with the sonorous title of "exkingtricities," nothing was left to the quarter but to roll its eyes and shut its mouth in mute amazement.

On the morning of the third day, the sky pushed aside its gray veil of clouds, and smiled once more upon the wet and melancholy earth. Thereupon the latter quickly dried up some of its tears, and made what shift for joy it could with the remainder. Every pool reflected a bit of the sky's wide smile, or the pleasant stir of overhanging foliage. The grand old evergreen oaks around Bergen Hall shook from their far-reaching boughs broken sunlight and dancing shadows, fresh breeze and shining raindrops, in nearly equal measure. The whisper of the pine-woods

became a song rather than a sigh;—or, if it were a sigh, it was of that pleasant kind which struggles up unconsciously from a heart a little overfull of pleasure. Even the long streamers of gray moss decked themselves with prismatic jewels, and forgot to be mournful.

“If you do not mind a little mud,” said the Major, at the dinner-table, “we will order our horses, and ride over to Berganton this afternoon. You must be tired of being cooped up in the house, by this time, in spite of your ready knack at finding occupation and amusement where most people would gape their heads off with *ennui*. Besides, it is high time that you should see something of the neighborhood, outside our own plantation,—as well as the village which your ancestors founded. To be sure, there is precious little to see,—Berganton is not what it was once,—but I shall be glad to show you that little, and also, to introduce you to some of my old acquaintances.”

As the two gentlemen were riding through the mutilated avenue, Bergan could not help asking if the trees which had formerly arched and shaded it had been felled on account of decay.

“No,” replied the Major, a little gruffly, as if he suspected a latent rebuke in the question; “but they spoiled twenty or thirty acres of the best corn-land on the plantation, and were very valuable for timber, besides. And, about that time, I was bent on lifting a certain old mortgage off from the place, and getting generally forehanded with the world, at any sacrifice, short of selling land. However,” he continued, his face clearing again, “if you will stay here, Harry, you shall replant the avenue, just as soon as you like, if that is your pleasure. The trees will not grow large enough to do much damage, in my time;—besides, I can afford the land now,—and almost anything else that you may happen to fancy. I have not saved and slaved all these years for nothing;—you may be certain of that. And, as I’ve said before, I don’t believe in half-way work.

If you stay here, it will be as my adopted son ; and I mean to show myself an indulgent father."

A kindlier smile than was often seen on the Major's rugged features, lit up his face as he concluded. Then, suddenly turning to Bergan, and holding out his hand, he asked, in the husky tone of emotion, and with a look of entreaty,—

"Shall we shake hands upon it ?"

Bergan was taken by surprise. In grateful recognition of his uncle's manifest kindness of intention, as well as of his unwonted softness of manner, he impulsively clasped the outstretched hand. At once he became aware that, in so doing, he had appeared to yield an unqualified assent to his uncle's wishes. Hurriedly casting about for inoffensive phraseology wherein to disavow any such intent, it was singularly hard to find. To increase the difficulty, Major Bergan was pouring forth his gratification that the matter was finally settled, in terms of unusual warmth and animation. It was evident, not only that the plan lay nearer to his heart than had hitherto appeared, but that he himself had taken stronger hold of his uncle's affections than he had imagined.

In fact, Bergan had come to the Major just at the auspicious moment when, having measurably accomplished the object which had absorbed all his thoughts and energies for many years, he was looking around him for something to fill its place in his life, and beginning vaguely to discern that his heart was empty, and his future aimless. The old family home was not the only thing that he had left to go drearily to ruin, while pursuing his own selfish ends in his own unscrupulous way.

Beholding, at this moment, a frank, brave, handsome youth by his side, full of talent and of promise, and singularly attractive in manner,—in whose veins, too, ran some of the same blood that filled his own, and whose features were moulded after the best ancestral type,—his dormant

affections quickly awakened to fasten themselves pertinaciously around the timely object. His thoughts began industriously to shape out for himself a new future, which should embrace, as a setting its appropriate jewel, a brilliant and prosperous career for this young hope of his house. The unsuspected strength of these feelings now made itself clearly visible, both in the hearty grasp which he gave his nephew's hand, and in a sudden affectionateness of eyes, mouth, voice, gesture, and every indescribable manifestation, that Bergan had never seen in him before. Naturally enough, the young man shrank from the utterance of words certain to drive back on itself this outgush of the inestimable tenderness of a stern nature, to bring back the old sharpness and severity to eyes that now lay so soft and deep under their shaggy brows.

Moreover, he felt that his own resolution was wavering. Bergan Hall had grown strangely dear to him during his solitary occupation of its silent, but suggestive precincts. He might have been proof against every temptation that it could have offered in its grandeur and its prosperity; but in its loneliness and decay there was a pathetic appeal to much that was best and noblest in his nature. To this influence, a stronger one, even, was now added. Seeing the strength of his uncle's new-born affection, and its softening effect upon his face and manner, Bergan began to question within himself whether a still better and nobler work than the restoration of the ancestral home, might not here call for his hand—even the restoration of a human life. Those woful habits of intoxication and profanity, far worse than the dry-rot that gnawed at the timbers of the old Hall; that roughness and sordidness which had gathered over the once promising character, far sadder to behold than the mould and the dust that dimmed the ancestral grandeur;—were there not moral instruments available for the cure of the one, as there were artisan's tools able to remove all traces of the other.

To young minds there is always a strong fascination in the prospect of exerting a good influence upon others. Older heads—seeing how little is often effected by the best and most persistent endeavors, and sadly cognizant of the fact that influences are received as well as exerted (a long deterioration in one's self being sometimes the price of a little, brief improvement in another)—are not so ready to take upon themselves the responsibility of acting upon any human soul, nor so sanguine of success. But Bergan had none of this late wisdom,—if wisdom it be. Through his quiet character there ran the golden vein of a noble enthusiasm. He believed that it was his part and duty to make the world better for having lived therein. Still susceptible to influences himself, he had no conception of the iron bands, the indestructible tendencies, of evil habits indulged for years. He stood ready, at any time, and anywhere, to throw himself into the long conflict between Right and Wrong, and doubted not that the issue of the fray would turn upon his single sword.

Half-buried in thought, half-listening to his uncle's talk, he rode mechanically onward. On one side of his path, flowed the smooth, shining waters of the creek; on the other ran the Bergan estate, with its odd aspect of mingled thrift and neglect. He had often wondered at the singular blending, in his uncle's character, of the sturdy English energy inherited from that indefatigable Briton, Sir Harry, with the indifference and impromptitude induced by the climate. It was especially curious to note how these diverse qualities displayed themselves in different directions. With human beings, his laborers and dependents, and even with his animals, he was prompt, energetic, and exacting, accepting no excuses, and showing no indulgence; with inanimate things, he was often careless, negligent, and unobservant. On this portion of the estate, which seemed but little cultivated, fences were down or dilapidated, gates swung unwillingly on their

hinges, and outbuildings seemed ready to fall with their own weight.

Soon, too, these things were made more noticeable by contrast, as a long line of neatly-kept grounds and well ordered fences came into view. Shortly after, a pleasant cottage, amply provided with broad, cool, vine-draped piazzas, appeared on the right; standing a little apart from the road, in the midst of a group of live-oak trees scarcely less grand and venerable than those which flung their heavy shadow over Bergan Hall. At sight of it, the Major's face grew dark again; especially as Bergan, pleased with its neat and cheerful aspect, turned to give it a second look.

"Yes," he burst forth bitterly, with a fearful oath, "that is where my brother, the hardware merchant, lives! I tell you what, Harry, the very first thing that you are to do, as soon as you get a chance (if I don't live to do it myself), is to buy out his heirs, and raze that impertinent shanty to the ground. Just recollect that, will you? if I should happen to forget to put it into my will."

Bergan forebore to reply. He was learning that it was his wisest course—at least, so he thought—to take no notice of his uncle's bitter wrath and prejudice, since he could not sympathize with them. If his growing wish to possess Bergan Hall lay at the bottom of this silence, he was as yet unconscious of it.

His uncle,—accepting his forbearance as a sign of acquiescence to his wishes,—now, for the first time, really exerted himself for his entertainment. He talked with vivacity, humor, intelligence, and much of the tone and manner of his earlier days. His better self revived, for a time; and Bergan recognized something of the refined, cultured, accomplished gentleman, of his mother's descriptions, whose lightsome flow of spirits, gay sparkle of wit, and frank, cordial address, had made him the life and soul of the circle wherein he moved. It was mournful to see him

under this pleasant transformation, and think of him in his usual aspect. Bergan could not but wonder how he had ever fallen to that lower level. He had not seen the easy descent from gayety to dissipation of his younger days; nor could he understand how naturally, with years, drinking in frivolous companionship had been exchanged for drinking alone, lavishness for parsimony, the gay, aimless life of a man of the world for the steady, energetic pursuit of one selfish, isolated, exclusive object.

They now reached the village. As they rode through its principal street, which was wide and handsomely shaded, the Major pointed to one and another of the houses along its sides, and quietly named men and women that had occupied them in years ago; either forgetting, or unaware, that most of them were now tenantry that one earthly house, of whose narrow accommodations every mortal must needs have some experience,—namely, the grave.

Bergan, meanwhile, felt himself quite at home among names so often heard from his mother's lips; and momentarily expected that his uncle would stop at some one of these friendly dwellings, for the renewal of his own acquaintance, and the introduction of his nephew. But to his extreme surprise, the Major rode straight through the village, and dismounted before a tavern, at its extreme end.

VII.

A BITTER DRAUGHT.

IT needed but a glance to show Bergan that the tavern was of the lower sort. It was dingy and dilapidated without, and from its open windows were wafted sounds of hoarse voices, shouts of laughter, the jingling of glasses, and a strong odor of tobacco, betokening a corresponding amount of moral dinginess and dilapidation within. Bergan turned to his uncle with a disgust that he hardly attempted to conceal,—the natural disgust of a healthy body and mind for things coarse, foul, noisy, and vulgar,—and inquired ;—

“ Do you intend to stop here long ? ”

“ Quite long enough for you to get off and stretch yourself,” replied the Major, carelessly. “ This is an old halting-place of mine, and looks as natural as possible, though it is a year or more since I have set eyes on it. No doubt I shall find some old acquaintances here. Come ! don’t sit there gaping at the outside, like a man trying to guess at the purport of a letter from the looks of the envelope, when the inside would tell him what he wants to know, in a jiffy ; get off your horse, and come in.”

Bergan obeyed, but with a manifest reluctance that brought a cloud to the Major’s brow. Muttering something between his teeth, which had the tone and bitterness of a curse, but was unintelligible, the latter led the way to the bar-room.

Several varieties of the genus loafer, both of the genteel and vulgar species, were leaning over the counter, or seated in tilted-up chairs, puffing out tobacco smoke, and

discussing matters of local interest. The appearance of the Major was greeted with enthusiasm,—all the more, that his first words, after a “How d’y” of very general application, were an order to the landlord to make a stiff bowl of punch, on a scale commensurate with the numbers of the party.

“This is my nephew, gentlemen,” he went on, addressing the delighted audience,—“Harry Bergan Arling, as he now calls himself, or Harry Bergan, of Bergan Hall, as he is to be, in good time,—a real chip of the old family block, as you can see at a glance. I expect that you will all do me the honor of drinking his health in a bowl of the best punch that Gregg can concoct. Hurry up, Gregg! you know how I like it,—not too strongly flavored with our two days’ drizzle;—was there ever a nastier spell of weather?”

“Never knew the sky so leaky in all my life,” responded a languid loafer of the genteeler sort, too lazy to furnish his sentences with nominatives. “Begun to think, with Father Miller, ’twas getting worn out.”

“It will last our time, I reckon,” returned the Major. “And ‘after us the deluge,’ of course. I would not mind taking a swim in it myself, if it were of punch such as Gregg, there, is mixing. It looks like the real thing! Now, gentlemen, step forward and take your glasses. Here’s to the health of my nephew,—Harry Bergan,—and may he unite in his single person all the virtues of all the Harrys of the line, from Sir Harry down;—yes, and all the vices, too, they are good Bergan stock, every one of them!”

A toast so perfectly in harmony with the corrupt atmosphere of the bar-room could but be received and drunk with acclamation. Bergan, perforce, lifted his glass to his lips, but the fiery draught, prepared with a single eye to the requirements of his uncle’s sophisticated palate, was so little suited to his own purer taste, that he set it down with

its contents very little diminished. Observing this, Major Bergan's face grew dark.

"That will never do, Harry," he growled, aside. "Don't disgrace me here, whatever you may do at home! I insist upon your emptying your glass like a man, and doing your part towards making things pleasant. Now, then, gentlemen," he continued, aloud, "be pleased to make ready for toast the second. We will drink success to my nephew's future proprietorship of Bergan Hall;—may it come late, and last long!"

The cords of conventionalism—even the conventionalism of a bar-room—are strong; and Bergan was somewhat young for complete independence of character. Nevertheless, he was quite capable of turning his back on the whole company of tipplers, both genteel and vulgar, indifferent alike to their wonder, censure, or scorn, had it not been for his uncle; whose wishes, in his double character of host and relative, seemed entitled to some degree of respect. Yet both instinct and principle revolted from the certain intoxication of the distasteful glass in his hand. By a quick and dexterous motion, he sent half its contents flying out of the window near which he stood, and supplied their place with water from a convenient pitcher. Flattering himself that he had done this unobserved, he tried to swallow his disgust at the place and the companionship in which he found himself with the diluted draught.

"That's pretty fair stuff," said the Major, setting down his empty glass; "it has just about the right snap in it. Is there enough for another round, Gregg?"

"Plenty, sir, and another one on the end of that. I knew you didn't like to see the bottom of the bowl, in a hurry, Major."

"You are another Solon, Gregg. Your wisdom is only to be equalled by your disinterestedness. Come, gentlemen, fill your glasses again! Harry, is your glass filled?"

As he spoke, the Major drew near, and fixed a keen eye

on Bergan's glass, in a way which led the latter to suspect that his late manœuvre had not been so successful as he had imagined. At any rate, it would not be easy to repeat it. Well, what matter? He had submitted to his uncle's tyranny long enough; he might as well free himself first as last. He would try to do so in the way least likely to give offence.

"Uncle," he pleaded, with a graceful frankness and courtesy that could scarcely have failed to reach the Major's better self, if it had been less under the vitiating influence of strong drink,—“uncle, I really must beg your kind indulgence. I am not accustomed to potations so many nor so strong; and whatever I may be able to do, in time, under your skilful guidance, I must now use a little discretion. Pray excuse me from taking any more at present.”

“I'll be hanged if I do!” said the Major, bluntly. “If you don't know how to drink like a gentleman and a Bergan, it is high time you should learn. Fill up his glass, Gregg; he *shall* drink!”

Scarcely were the insulting words spoken ere Bergan felt, with a thrill of dismay, a hot tingling sensation in all his veins, as if the blood in them had suddenly been turned to fire. Too well he knew what it meant. The “black Bergan temper,” which had been the one, great sorrow and struggle of his life, thus far, and which he had believed to be completely tamed, was stirring within him in a way to show that, if it were not instantly controlled, it would carry him, in its headlong fury, he knew not whither. Every other feeling, every other thought, were, for the moment, swallowed up in the instinct of self-preservation. He would submit to his uncle's imperious dictation, not that he either prized his love or feared his anger, but because that treacherous demon within must at once feel a firm foot upon its neck, and be shown that it could expect no indulgence, and no quarter.

At this moment, there was a slight bustle at the door,

occasioned by an arrival; under cover of which he again turned to the friendly water pitcher, to make sure that, while fleeing from one fatal influence he was not running blindly into the leashes of another.

"*Dimidium plus toto*, I see," observed a well-remembered voice at his elbow, in a tone of good-natured sarcasm. "But you make a slight mistake in your practical translation; it is a 'half,' not a quarter (or I might say, an eighth) which is 'better than the whole.' And anyway, I doubt if old Hesiod meant his maxim to apply to punch."

Glad of anything that promised to create a diversion, Bergan turned and gave the hand of Richard Causton a much more cordial grasp than he would have been likely to do, under other circumstances. The old man, better accustomed to the cold shoulder from all reputable acquaintance, returned it with tears in his bleary eyes, and for once, had no proverb at command wherein to do justice to his feelings. Before he could find one, Major Bergan came up, with a sly gleam of humor or of mischief, on his face. "What! you know Harry!" he exclaimed. "Oh! yes, I remember,—you helped him on his way to Bergan Hall. So much the better. You will be glad to know that it was my nephew to whom you showed that courtesy, and to drink to your better acquaintance. All ready?"

Bergan turned round for his glass, which he had left standing on the window-sill, and, the sooner to be done with the distasteful business, swallowed at a gulp what, it seemed to him, the next moment, must have been liquid fire. A loud laugh from his uncle told him to whom he was indebted for the substitution of raw spirit for weak punch. The passion which he had so promptly smothered, doubly inflamed by the consciousness of being betrayed and the instantaneous action of the potent draught, blazed up with sudden, ungovernable fury. Feeling that he was losing control of temper and reason together, he rushed toward the door. At a sign from the Major, two or three

of the bystanders threw themselves in his way. They were instantly sent reeling right and left by two powerful blows. Dick Causton, catching hold of him with the friendly design of preventing him from doing more mischief and provoking more enmity, was shaken off with a violence that threw him in a disordered heap on the floor; over which Bergan strode wrathfully towards his uncle, who had planted himself in the doorway. The spectators held their breath to witness the expected encounter between uncle and nephew,—Bergan against Bergan, the blood of both up, the hereditary frenzy blazing in each pair of dark eyes.

But Bergan was not quite so mad as that. Seeing who it was that impeded his way, he turned and darted through a window close at hand, jumped over the piazza railing, sprang upon his horse, and was off before the bystanders had well recovered their breath, or Dick had picked himself up, with the caustic observation,—

“Perit quod facis ingrato,—‘Save a thief from hanging, and he will cut your throat.’”

Poor Vic!—never in all her life had she been urged to such mad and merciless speed as on that ill-starred day. Protesting, at first, by various plunges and rearings, she finally fell in with her master’s wild humor, and sped through the village at a pace that sent the foot-passengers to the fences in terror, and crowded the doors and windows with wondering gazers. Whether he were fleeing from destruction, or riding straight to it, was no affair of hers; in either case, she would do her best to meet his wishes. The village was quickly left behind; house after house, and field after field, slid by in a swift panorama; already they were turning the corner, toward the Hall, when Bergan’s scattered senses were suddenly recalled by a stern “Halloo! what are you about?” mingled with a faint cry of alarm. To his horror, he saw himself to be on the point of riding down a young lady equestrian, who was on her

way to the village, accompanied by her father. There was not an instant to lose, not a moment for reflection; the heads of the two horses were almost in contact. Putting his whole strength into one sudden, ill-considered jerk, Vic was thrown back on her haunches, and he and she rolled over in the mud together.

Fortunately, neither was much hurt, and both sprang to their feet considerably sobered by the shock. Bergan was deeply humiliated, also; he would gladly have compounded with his mortification for almost any amount of physical pain. No bodily injury could have made him writhe with so sharp a pang, as the conviction that he had flawed his claim to the title of gentleman. To have nearly ridden over a lady, in a blind frenzy of rage and semi-intoxication, was a disgrace that he could never forget. He would gladly have buried himself in the mud with which he was already tolerably well coated. Since he could not do that, he took off his hat to the horseman,—he dared neither address nor look at the lady,—and said, in a tone that trembled with shame and regret,—

“I beg your pardon, sir.”

“You would have done better to look where you were going,” replied the gentleman, with the unreasoning anger that often follows upon the reaction from fear and anxiety. “No thanks to you that my daughter is not maimed or killed!”

“I think you mistake, father,” quickly interposed the young lady, in a low, sweet voice, tremulous from the recent shock to her nerves;—“did you not see how promptly the gentleman sacrificed himself to save me, as soon as he saw the danger? I hope you are not hurt, sir,” she added, courteously, turning to Bergan.

“Thank you; not half so much as I deserve to be,” replied he, only the more remorseful on account of the delicate consideration that she showed for him, while her cheek was still blanched, and her lips trembling, at her own

narrow escape from danger caused by his rashness. And, feeling wholly unworthy to say another word to anything so pure and sweet, so utterly incompatible with the vile place and scene which he had just quitted, he stood aside, with uncovered head, to let her pass.

Apparently, she would have lingered long enough to make sure that he was really uninjured; but her father, who had been eyeing him keenly, hurried her away. "Do you not see," he inquired, sharply, as they rode on, "that the fellow is drunk?"

"Impossible, father! He had such a fine, noble countenance!"

"It will not be noble long," replied the father. "Neither will it be the first noble countenance that has been spoiled by drunkenness," he added, with a sigh.

Left alone, Bergan remounted Vic, though not without difficulty. The bewildering effect of his potent draught, which had momentarily been overcome by the excitement of his late adventure, now made itself felt again. As he rode along, his head began to swim; a deadly nausea seized him; his limbs seemed paralyzed. Arrived within the gates of his uncle's domain, he suffered himself to slide slowly from the saddle to the ground; and almost immediately, consciousness forsook him.

VIII.

AS A DREAM WHEN ONE AWAKETH.

WHEN, in due course of time, Bergan came partially to himself, he found that he was lying on his own bed, with the twilight shadows gathering duskily in its hangings. But his mind was too dull and confused to trouble itself with the question how he came there, notwithstanding that his ears seemed still to retain the sound of low voices, and his limbs the pressure of careful hands. Scarcely had he unclosed his heavy eyes, ere he was glad to shut them again, and to sink anew into slumber.

But this time, it was not, as before, a profound stupor, a deaf, blind, torpid, state of nothingness. Though it lasted some hours, he never quite lost an oppressive sense of overhanging trouble, imperfectly as its nature was apprehended. Moreover, he was harassed by dreams of that most trying character, wherein varying images revolve around one fixed idea; combining the misery of continual change with that of ceaseless iteration into one intolerable horror.

Breaking, at length, from the teasing spell of these phantasms, he saw that it was past midnight. Through the opposite window, he beheld a pale, waning moon, and, by its light, a gray, dimly-outlined landscape,—a faint and lifeless sketch, as it were, of a once bright, breathing world. While he looked, over it came the black shadow of a wind-driven cloud, blurring the lines, here and there, into still grayer indistinctness, sweeping across the lawn, mounting the steps of Bergan Hall, and laying, at last, its thin, light hand over his own brow and eyes.

With it, as if by right of near kinship, a deep gloom fell upon his heart. Till now, it had not occurred to him why his head ached so heavily, nor what weary weight it was that burdened his mind. Yet he did not—as too many would have done, after a brief flush of shame, and a momentary feeling of regret—seek to throw off this burden by telling himself that his late aberration was, after all, a matter of small moment, since it was only what hundreds like him had done before, were now doing, and would continue to do till the end of time. Not of any such weak stuff, incapable of looking his own acts squarely in the face, and judging them according to their merits, was Bergan made. On the contrary, he felt as much humiliated as if he had been the first, last, only intoxicated young man in the universe.

And this, be it understood, was not so much because he had violated the higher law, as because he had broken his own law unto himself. With the Bergan temper, he had also inherited a fair share of the Bergan pride, and the Bergan strength of will. But, softened and guided by home influences at once wise and genial, the one had hitherto shown itself mainly in a lofty, almost an ideal, purity of character, and the other had expended its force chiefly upon himself. The two, therefore, had served him little less effectually, in keeping him free from current vices, than higher motives might have done. He had taken a stern, proud pleasure in knowing that he wore no yoke but such as it pleased him deliberately to assume. He would have scorned to say, what he often heard from the lips of his fellows,—“*I cannot quit drinking, I cannot live without smoking, I cannot resist the fascinations of gambling,*” et cætera;—he would have felt it a woful slur upon his manhood to avow himself so abject a slave to his animal nature. So strong was this pride of character, that no sooner did he feel any habit, any appetite, any pleasure, however innocent in itself, taking firm

hold of him, than he was immediately impelled to give it up, to refuse it indulgence,—for a time, at least,—just to satisfy one part of himself that its control over the other and baser part was still perfect. At whatever price, he was determined to be his own master.

It may be imagined, then, with what sharp sting of pride, what miserable sense of weakness and failure, he writhed, as Memory now flung open the doors of her silent gallery, and showed him sombre picture after picture, representing his own figure in divers humiliating positions. It shrank from the utterance of its strong convictions of right; it gave way to the assaults of a poor ambition; it drifted with circumstance; it was driven to and fro like a shuttlecock between outward temptation and inward passion; it was successively a fighting rowdy, a blind lunatic, an insensate drunkard.

Not that these representations were all true in tone, unexaggerated in color, and correct in sentiment. Often, there is nothing more difficult than to fix upon the exact point where the plain boundary line between right and wrong was crossed; and neither pride nor remorse is apt to do it correctly. Some steps may have been taken upon a kind of debatable ground; had the march been arrested at any one of these, its tendency would have been different. In reviewing his conduct, Bergan failed to do justice either to his uncle's undeniable claims to his respectful consideration, up to the point where he had been required to follow him into a low bar-room, or to the real beauty and worth of some of his own feelings and motives. Looking back, he saw—or seemed to see—only a pitiable career of irresolution and moral cowardice, ending in disgrace. Covering his face with his hands, as if to shut out the unwelcome sight, he groaned aloud.

To his surprise, the groan was distinctly prolonged and repeated. Was it the responsive wail of the ancestral spirits, mourning over their degenerate scion, or only the

sympathizing echo of the ancestral walls? Springing to his feet, he beheld a tall, erect figure standing on the hearth, showing strangely weird and unearthly by the flickering blaze of a few dying embers. Not till it turned and came toward him did he recognize the dusky features and age-whitened hair of Maumer Rue.

"I hope that it is not on my account that you are up at this time of night," said he, gravely.

"You forget that night and day are both alike to me," she quietly answered. "Are you better?"

"Much better, thank you." And he added after a moment,—“How came I here?”

"Brick found you in the avenue. By my direction, you were brought in. At first, it was thought that you had been thrown from your horse, but—"

Rue paused.

"I understand," said Bergan, bitterly. "I was drunk."

Rue did not immediately answer. It was only after some moments that she said, earnestly;—

"Master Bergan, I am an old woman. I have seen four generations of your house,—I have nursed two,—and I have spent my life in its service. If it had been my own, I could not have loved it better, nor felt its welfare nearer my heart. If these things give me any right to say a word of warning to you, let me say it now!"

"Say whatever seems good to you," replied Bergan, gloomily, as he flung himself into a chair. "I doubt if you can say anything so hard to bear as what I have already said to myself."

"Is that so?" asked Rue, in a tone of relief—"is that really so? Then I need not say anything. It is a higher voice than mine that speaks within you; and my poor words would only weaken its effect. Only listen to it, Master Bergan, pray listen to it!" she went on, with tears streaming from her blind eyes. "If you stifle it now, it may never speak so clearly again!"

"Make yourself easy, maumer," answered Bergan, much affected, yet doing his best to speak cheerfully,—*"I have not the least intention of stifling it. Moreover, I assure you that I am in no danger of repeating last night's miserable experience; drunkenness is not my besetting sin. I only wish I were as certain that I should never again give way to my temper."*

"It has run in the blood a great while," remarked Rue, not without a certain respect for its length of pedigree; *"it will be hard to get it out."*

"It *shall* be gotten out, though," responded Bergan, knitting his brows and setting his teeth with true hereditary doggedness.

"Very likely it may," replied Rue, quietly, *"if you take that tone. No doubt the Lord meant the Bergan will to conquer the Bergan temper—with His help. But I will not trouble you any longer, sir;—thank you for setting my mind at rest. And don't be offended if I recommend you not to come in your uncle's way this morning; give him a little time to get into a better mood. I will send your breakfast out to you."*

Bergan's brow darkened. "I do not intend to come in his way," he answered a little shortly, *"neither this morning, nor at any other time. My visit here is at an end. I leave this house directly."*

"Oh, Master Bergan, I beg you will not do that!" exclaimed Rue. "Your uncle really loves you in his heart; he will soon forget all about his anger."

"It is not because I dread his anger that I go," replied Bergan, gravely; *"it is because he has lowered me in my own eyes, and disgraced me in the eyes of others, in a way that I cannot forget. At least, not until I have proved to myself that I am neither a moral coward nor a miserable parasite, and to the world that drinking and fighting are not the essential conditions of my existence. I cannot well do either without leaving Bergan Hall. And I certainly*

shall not put myself in my uncle's way again, until he sees fit to apologize for what he did yesterday."

"Is the world turned upside down, then," asked Rue, with a kind of slow wonder, "that an old uncle must apologize to a young nephew?"

Bergan colored, and the unwonted bitterness and irritation of his manner gave way before the force of the implied rebuke.

"Thank you," said he, almost in his natural tone, "I see that I am—or, at least, that I was,—a little beside myself. Still, I must leave Bergan Hall. I cannot think it right or expedient to remain here longer. But when I have put myself in the way of living independently, and cleared up my reputation, I will do what I can, without loss of self-respect, to establish friendly relations with my uncle. Indeed, I do not mean to be foolishly resentful, nor unbecomingly exacting."

"May I ask what you are going to do?" inquired Rue, after a few moments of thought.

"Certainly. I am going to carry out my original plan, and my mother's express wish, by opening a law-office in Berganton, and doing my best to win fame and fortune in the place which my ancestors founded; and in which," he added, with a smile, "their shades may reasonably be expected to watch my career with especial interest, and also to do me a good turn, whenever they have it in their power."

"Well," said Rue, after a long pause, "perhaps you are right. I think I begin to see that it may be quite as well for you to go away, for a time. You shall not lose anything by it; I will take care of that. I have more influence with your uncle than you would think. And I promise you,—remember, I promise you," she repeated, with marked emphasis,—“whatever comes, you shall have Bergan Hall."

The young man shook his head. "I think not," said

he. "Indeed, I have ceased to wish for it; I do not see any place for it in the life which I now contemplate. It was but a pleasant day-dream, at best; and it is over."

"It may be over for you," rejoined Rue, quietly, "but it is not over for me. And my dreams are apt to come true. I may not live to see it,—indeed, it is borne in upon me that I shall not,—but the Hall will surely be yours, one day."

Bergan again shook his head. Without making any pretensions to the prophetic gift, he thought he could foretell, better than old Rue, the effect of the course which he had marked out for himself, upon his uncle. But the blind woman could not see the gesture; and he forebore to put his doubt into words,—unless its subtle prompting was to be detected in his next apparently irrelevant sentence:—

"I shall think it one of my first duties to go and see my uncle Godfrey."

"I am glad to hear it," replied Rue, placidly. "He is a wise, just man; and no doubt he will give you good advice about setting up your profession. I have been hoping that, through you, this long family breach would be healed."

And here the conversation strayed off amid thick-growing family topics, where it is unnecessary to follow it.

Gray dawn was in the east when, after a long, lingering look at the ancestral portraits, Bergan went out from the old Hall. He could scarcely believe that it was less than a week since he first entered it. He had passed there one of those crises of life which do the work of years. His short occupancy had left its indelible impress upon his character, for good or evil.

Rue attended him to the door, and detained him for a moment on the threshold.

"If ever you are in need of a quiet place where you can feel perfectly at home," said she, "come here. Your room shall always be ready for you; and you might stay here for weeks together, and no one be the wiser,—rarely

does any one but me come inside the door. And if ever you should be in any trouble, or in any want, come and see what the old, blind woman can do for you; she may be better able to help you than you think. And now, good-bye, and God bless you, my dear young master—the future master of Bergan Hall!”

She raised her withered hands and sightless eyes to heaven, as she ended; and when Bergan looked back from the farther verge of the lawn, she was standing there still, in the dim dawn-light, a gray, venerable, ghostly figure, framed in his ancestral doorway, calling down blessings on his head.

IX.

THE BLOT CLEAVES.

YOUTHFUL spirits have a natural buoyancy that floats them easily over the first wave of trouble, however severe. It is the long succession of wearing disappointments and corroding griefs, of anxious days and restless nights, of abortive aims and hopes deferred, which finally overcomes their lightsomeness, and sinks them fathoms deep under a smooth-flowing surface of gentle cheerfulness, a teasing ebb and flow of worriment, or an icy plane of despair.

But of this grievous iteration, and its depressing effect, Bergan, as yet, had no experience. His heart involuntarily grew lighter as he went down the long avenue. The old Hall, with its dust-clogged and tradition-darkened atmosphere, its dusky delights and duskier temptations, seemed to fade back again into the unsubstantiality of his childhood's visions. His sojourn there was, at best, but a brief, casual episode in an otherwise coherent life. He now recurred to the main argument. Not that he could foresee precisely how it was to be wrought out. But the very uncertainty before him was not without its own special and potent charm. It gave such unlimited scope to hope and imagination; there was in it so much room for sturdy endeavor and noble achievement, for an iron age of progress, and a golden era of fame!

It was still early when he reached the Berganton Hotel. The landlord was in the office; he was also in the midst of a prolonged matutinal stretch and yawn, when Bergan surprised him with a pleasant;—

"Good morning. Have you a vacant room for me?"

"Yes, sir,—that is, I will see," was the somewhat inconclusive reply; its first clause being due to the favorable impression made by Bergan's face and manner, and its last to prudential considerations arising from the quickly recognized facts that this prepossessing young man was on foot, and without baggage. "Do you want it long?"

"I can hardly tell,—some days, perhaps; possibly longer. I wish to see if it be worth my while to locate myself permanently here. My name is Bergan Arling. My baggage is to be sent over from Bergan Hall."

"Ah, I see," said the landlord, in a tone which implied that he had suddenly been lifted to a point of observation at once wide and unpromising. And almost immediately he added,—“On the whole, I believe I haven't got an eligible room to offer you. The one that I thought of at first is partially engaged; I cannot let it go till I know the gentleman's decision.”

Bergan was gifted with perceptions too quick and fine not to notice the unfavorable effect produced by his frank explanation of himself. Nor was he slow to divine the cause. No doubt his name had been bruited abroad in connection with the disgraceful scenes of yesterday; and, as a natural consequence, in the very place where it would otherwise have been an advantage to him, it would now stand in his way. His heart sank a little to find that he had not left yesterday's acts so completely behind him as he had allowed himself to believe. He had still to endure his inevitable term of bondage to their evil consequences.

Yet herein, he remembered, was his strongest motive for perseverance in the path upon which he had entered. He could not leave a tarnished reputation behind him in the place founded by his ancestors,—the very dust of which, blowing about the streets, doubtless held many particles closely akin to his own earthly substance, and dimly capable of pride or shame on his account. At

whatever cost of present pain or ulterior loss, he must stay in Berganton long enough to set himself right in the public eyes.

And loss, it was plain, there might be. Berganton was no longer the busy and prosperous town of his mother's reminiscences. All these years, it had been going backwards. Looking up and down its long, tame, principal street, with its scant and sluggish flow of human life, he could discover little field for energy, little scope for ambition. Were it not for the cords of obligation woven around him by yesterday's events, he would scarcely have stayed for a second look. But those cords held him firmly to his purpose.

"Do you know of any respectable family where I should be likely to obtain board, or, at least, lodgings?" was his next inquiry.

"I do not. I think they might take you in at the Gregg House, down at the lower end of the street."

The words were spoken carelessly enough, yet Bergan could scarcely fail to detect in them a covert insinuation, or to imagine one. His cheek crimsoned, and his eye flashed. Ere he could speak, however, a gentleman whom he had observed sitting near him, with a newspaper before his face, dropped the printed screen, and came forward.

"Mr. Arling can breakfast here, at any rate," said he, in the tone of a man accustomed to overcome all obstacles; "it will give me pleasure to have him for my *vis-à-vis* at the early breakfast that I have bespoken this morning, in order to gain time for a visit to a far-away patient. And you can at least give him the room of which you speak until it is called for; by that time, we will hope, he may be provided with one even more to his mind."

"Certainly, doctor," returned the landlord, looking a little crestfallen. "If I had known the gentleman was a friend of yours—"

"Hardly that yet," interposed the doctor, smiling,

"though I trust he may be, in good time. I know your uncle very well," he continued, addressing Bergan, as the landlord moved away,—“indeed, I may say, your two uncles,—if that be any ground of acquaintance. But I have the advantage of you, in that I heard your name just now;—mine is Remy—Felix Remy—very much at your service. Not that this announcement places us on an equal footing; for, while your name puts me at once in possession of your antecedents, to a certain extent, mine tells you nothing about me except that I am of French descent. Are you willing to take the rest on trust, until a fitting time for a fuller explanation?” And the doctor held out his hand.

“Until the end of time,” replied Bergan, grasping it warmly. “It would be strange if kindness were not its own sufficient explanation.”

Doctor Remy shrugged his shoulders with a frank cynicism. “Perhaps so,” said he. “Yet I make bold to confess that my own practice is to look kindness a little more closely in the face than its opposite. The latter generally wears its reasons openly on its forehead; but for the complicated motives at the bottom of the former, one needs to look long and deep.”

“Do they pay for the trouble?” asked Bergan, smiling.

“Not unless you love knowledge for its own sake. As society is constituted, you cannot well act upon it. To apparent kindness, one has to return apparent gratitude.”

“I trust I succeed in making mine ‘apparent,’” said Bergan, falling into the doctor’s humor.

“Perfectly. It could not be told from the genuine article.”

“The same thing might be said of your kindness.”

“Doubtless. But here comes Cato, to show you to your room. I think breakfast will be ready as soon as you are.”

A very few moments sufficed for Bergan to remove the traces of his early morning walk, and rejoin his new acquaintance in the breakfast-room. The two gentlemen at once seated themselves on opposite sides of the table. An opportunity was thus afforded them to observe each other at their leisure, of which Bergan was first to avail himself. His interest had been awakened by the doctor's peculiar style of conversation.

He saw before him a man of medium height and compactly built figure. His locks had been touched by thought or care to a premature grayness, for he had scarcely yet entered upon middle age. His features were regular, and would have been handsome had they been less keenly and coldly intellectual,—the physical mould was forgotten in the mental one that made itself so much more manifest. Their expression was one of active intelligence and calm force, embittered, at the mouth, by a touch of scorn. Yet the face did not absolutely repel; for many minds, it would possess an inscrutable fascination. It provoked study; it challenged the imagination and the understanding.

The doctor's conversation was marked by a curious frankness, and an equally curious reserve. He made no scruple whatever of opening to the light of day shadowy recesses of motive and aim that most men would studiously close, nor of putting himself at odds with the world on various points of social or moral ethics, nor of boldly questioning and criticising much that mankind consents to hold in reverence. Yet, at the end of an hour's conversation, though he had talked readily and fluently on many subjects, and said something true, or profound, or brilliant, or suggestive, about each, his interested, amused, startled, and bewildered hearer could find almost no *residuum* of his real opinions about any of them. It was impossible to decide where he had been in jest, and where in earnest; through his most serious argument had run a vein of

mockery, from under his profoundest thought had peeped forth a hidden sarcasm. His creed, social, moral, and political, continually slipped through the seeker's fingers in subtle, witty, or scornful negations and controversions.

Not that Bergan was conscious of this, at the moment,—nor, indeed, until after many days of familiar intercourse. He recognized in the doctor an intellectual cultivation of no ordinary depth and scope; he was interested and well-nigh dazzled by his originality of thought, the boldness of his attacks, and the freedom of his speculations; but the dubious aspect of his own affairs continually rose before him to harass his mind and distract his attention;—he was himself incapable of close observation or continuous thought. After a time, his glance sank upon his plate, or wandered aimlessly out of the window: though he forgot no requirement of courtesy, he was often in a state of semi-abstraction.

Then, in his turn, Doctor Remy fixed his eyes upon his companion. It was evident that he subjected him to a far more careful and penetrating scrutiny than he had sustained himself. He noted his looks, he weighed his words, he analyzed his turns of thought, in a way to indicate that exceeding "love of knowledge for its own sake," of which he had spoken, or some deeper motive than even his hardy frankness would care to divulge. Whether or no he liked what he saw, no mortal could have told. The doctor's face was a sort of mechanical mask, absolutely under his control; it expressed anything or nothing, according to his will.

One thing only would have been plain to the observer, that he was puzzled by something which he found, or did not find. After one of his deeply penetrating glances, he suddenly called for a bottle of wine, and, first filling his own glass, passed it across the table.

"I am fortifying myself for a harder day's work than usual," said he, as if by way of apology, if apology were

needed. "Will you try it? I think I can assure you that it is tolerably good."

"Thank you; I never take wine at breakfast."

"Anything else that you would prefer—" began the doctor, courteously.

"Nothing whatever, thank you," replied Bergan, with a most conclusive wave of the hand.

"Then you do not hold the theory that a little good wine, or other spirits, after a meal, clears the brain, and aids the digestion?"

"Do I look as if I stood in need of either good office?" asked Bergan, smiling.

The doctor gave him a quick, critical glance.

"No, I cannot see that you do," he answered. "I should say that, in your case, Nature might safely be left to perform her own functions;—I do not think I ever saw human mechanism in a sounder condition, or animated by a richer vitality. Still, there can be no great harm in drinking in moderation. Of course, if one cannot do that, it is best to avoid it altogether."

Bergan looked up quickly,—almost angrily,—but there was nothing in the doctor's face or manner to indicate that his general remark was weighted with any ulterior meaning. He was holding his wine up to the light with the air of a connoisseur, and having sufficiently enjoyed its color and *bouquet*, he tossed it off with apparent relish. Yet Bergan could scarcely have failed to notice, had he been less preoccupied, that he then quietly pushed both glass and bottle aside, and seemed to forget their existence.

"Can I do anything for you, before I set off on my daily treadmill?" he asked, when the meal was ended.

"Nothing, thank you,—unless you can tell me where I shall be most likely to find lodgings and an office."

"An office, did you say? Do I behold in you a brother of the order of the Asclepiadæ?"

"No, I have not that honor. I am enrolled in the ranks of the Law."

"How many pegs shall I take myself down, in your estimation, if I proclaim myself a deserter therefrom?"

Bergan could not help looking the astonishment that he did not express.

"It is true," said the doctor, answering the look. "I studied law, and practised it for about two years. But it did not suit me."

"Would it be impertinent to ask why?"

"Not at all. It gave too much scope, or too little, to my natural antagonism of mind;—too little for mental satisfaction, too much for material advantage. For instance, I was always possessed with an insane desire to clear the guilty man, whether he were my client, or no."

"Yet you deny to yourself the credit of generous impulses!"

"Stay a little. I was often assailed with an equally insane desire to convict the innocent one—when he was *not* my client. Do not look so horrified, for the same motive was at the bottom of both. It was because I saw so clearly that, with an exchange of circumstances,—inherited traits, education, temptation, and so forth,—there would also be an exchange of persons."

"In that case, it would seem that neither should be convicted."

"Exactly. But it was Society that needed to be convicted and punished. There was a real satisfaction in reversing its unrighteous judgments."

Bergan felt that he was sinking in a kind of mental quicksand. "But," he objected, catching hold of the first twig of support that offered itself, "you count the man's will for nothing."

"With most men, it does count for nothing. Where one man performs either a good or a bad action deliberately, looking behind and before him, nine hundred and

ninety-nine do it because of the pressure of outward circumstance."

"You think, then," said Bergan, after a moment's consideration, "that when a man wilfully embarks on the current which tends toward the Niagara cataract, it is his misfortune, and not his fault, if he finally finds himself at a point where the pressure of outward circumstance must needs carry him over the fall."

"In that case," said the doctor, "the responsibility shifts back to the power that made the current and the fall, and put them in his way."

Bergan saw the wide labyrinth of controversy opening before him, and tacitly declined to set foot in it. He was in no mood for polemics. He merely asked,—

"And in what way—if the question is admissible—do you find medicine more to your taste than the law?"

"In medicine, there is always a distinct and a legitimate foe to combat—disease. When one engages in a hand-to-hand fight with a fever, there are no side issues. Nor does it matter in the least whether battle is to be done over the body of an incarnate demon or an angel unfledged,—in both cases, the treatment is identical, the physician's duty the same."

"I think I understand you," said Bergan, after a pause, during which he had been trying to reconcile these curious and half conflicting statements with some underlying principles, and finding it, at last, in his own heart, rather than in the doctor's words;—"a physician's professional and abstract duty are never at variance, while a lawyer must often be puzzled to decide if he is justified in using his legal skill to save a criminal from merited punishment."

"It is a question that puzzles few of them," remarked the doctor, dryly. "But in regard to this office, *in posse*, of yours;—I rent my own from a very respectable widow lady, whose house is much too large for the narrow income to which she found herself restricted, at her husband's

death. I think she has another room, that she would be glad to let to an eligible tenant. Shall we go and see? It is quite in my way; I must visit my office before I set out on my rounds."

The house won Bergan's liking, at a glance. It stood on a corner; it was large and airy; double piazzas surrounded it on three sides; over it a hale old live-oak and half-a-dozen gray, decrepit china-trees flung their pleasant shade. In the rear, was a tempting thicket of a garden, which Art had first planted, and then handed over to Nature, to be taken care of at her leisure,—the result being an altogether admirable and Eden-like wilderness of boughs and vines, and, in their season, flowers and fruits, such as can be seen nowhere but at the South. The interior of the dwelling wore a most attractive look of neatness, comfort, and refinement, notwithstanding its extreme plainness of finish and furniture. Crossing its threshold, he felt that a true *home* had received him into its beneficent shadow. Nothing could be better for him, he thought, than to find an abiding place therein.

Nor was there any difficulty in the way. The doctor's magical touch arranged the preliminaries. Then, Mrs. Lyte,—a pale, sweet, fragile-looking woman, with the gentle gravity of manner that comes of sorrow at once incurable and resigned—yielded at once to the magnetism of Bergan's address,—the involuntary softening of tone wherewith he recognized the claim of her black garments upon his sympathies, the manifest deference which he paid to her loneliness, her bereavement, her sorrow. Since it was needful to sacrifice something of the home seclusion and sacredness to the necessity of daily bread, she could not hope for a more desirable tenant. The negotiations were quickly concluded. Not only was an office secured, but a lodging-room in its rear was also placed at his disposal; and he was to take his meals at the hotel.

Returning thither, and finding that his baggage had

duly arrived from the Hall, Bergan's active temperament would not let him rest until he had transported it to his new quarters, and gotten them in tolerable order. In this business he consumed the greater part of the day. The sun was low in the horizon, when, by way of a finishing touch, he nailed a tin plate, bearing in gilt letters the words,—“BERGAN ARLING, ATTORNEY AT LAW,” to his office window.

With the act, came a thrill of strange enjoyment. It was like the first breath of a new and invigorating atmosphere. That little sign imparted an element of solidity to his plans and aims, hitherto lacking. It marked an epoch in his life. Now, first, he flung himself, with all his strength and energy, into the great struggle of mankind.

To this pleasantly excited mood, motion was still desirable, weariness unfelt. He decided to pay a visit to his second, and yet unknown, uncle,—Godfrey Bergan. He quitted the village with the last, red sunbeams.

PART SECOND.

THE FRUIT OF THE WAY.



I.

THROUGH A MIST.

OAKSTEAD, the estate of Godfrey Bergan, was separated from the lands of the Hall by the small river—or “creek,” in local parlance—which has before been mentioned. The pleasant dwelling of the owner stood not far from a picturesque bend of the stream, commanding a view of its tawny, slumberous current for a considerable distance up and down,—a view made up of gentlest curves and softest coloring only, yet with enough of quiet beauty to arrest Bergan’s feet, for some moments, on the oak-shadowed lawn.

The river’s tide stole almost imperceptibly past, mirroring in its still bosom the sunset-painted sky, and the graver tinted objects of earth, with equal felicity,—like a gentle spirit, in whose well-ordered life the things of either world find their appropriate place and exquisite harmony. Just at that point of the upper stream where an artist would have placed it for the best pictorial effect, was the bridge of the main road, with rough abutments half-buried in wild foliage, and railings overrun with vines; and at a remoter point down its shining course, the slenderer span of a narrow footbridge, with a single rustic railing, was also seen, idealized by distance into an aërial passway fit for fairy

feet. In the earlier days of Godfrey's proprietorship, while the half-brothers were yet on friendly terms, this latter structure had furnished the means of easy and frequent communication between the two households. On the cessation of intercourse, however, Major Bergan had threatened its destruction, and had even begun an attack upon his own abutment; but his operations being suddenly suspended, and no convenient opportunity occurring for their resumption, he had finally left the work of demolition to be finished by the wear and tear of the elements, and the slow tooth of time. Though in a somewhat ruinous condition, and but insecurely poised on the damaged abutment, the bridge was still passable, with due caution; and, doubtless, it served for the nocturnal visits of such negroes of the two estates as were not set at odds by the bitterness of their masters' feud.

At a little distance below the footbridge, the river made another graceful bend, and soon disappeared in the shadow of the pine forest,—behind and above the dark, swaying fringe of which, the posthumous glory of the sun was fading from the western sky. Against this flitting splendor, the turret-like summits of the chimneys of Bergan Hall were distinctly visible. A little saddened by the sight, as forcing back on his mind thoughts and images which he had partially succeeded in flinging off, Bergan turned and walked quickly up the path to the house. Voices met him as he drew near. In one end of the broad piazza, so shut in by interlacing vines as to constitute a kind of leaf-tapestried parlor, two gentlemen were talking.

"I am afraid the identity is only too certain," said the smooth, sarcastic voice of Doctor Remy. "But I doubt if the habit be a confirmed one,—certainly, the physical indications are lacking. - At any rate, as I said before, he is evidently making an effort to overcome it."

"I wish that no such effort were necessary,"—began a different voice; but with the instinct of delicacy, Bergan set

his foot upon the lower step of the piazza in a way to be distinctly heard, and would have done the same had he supposed that the conversation concerned him, which he did not. The voice ceased abruptly, and a gentleman, whom he instantly recognized as his uncle, advanced to meet him. Though he had enough of the Bergan cast of feature to identify him at the first, casual glance, as belonging to the race, it was lost, almost as soon as seen, amid traits widely differing from the ancestral pattern. He was a much more genuine outcome of American soil than the rest of Sir Harry's descendants,—in whom a childhood fed upon old-world family traditions, and a youth spent at Oxford or Cambridge, had availed to preserve the English mould from all but the more unavoidable modifications. The race had always been marked by a greater volume of muscle, a ruddier complexion, and a sturdier texture of character, than was exactly native to the soil. But, in Godfrey Bergan, these characteristics were lacking. Though tall and well-formed, he was spare in figure and thin in face. His complexion had the true American sallowness of tint. In matters of bulk, weight, and coloring,—all the purely animal characteristics,—he fell far below the standard of his half-brother. By way of indemnity, his figure had more litheness and grace; and his features were more clearly cut, and endowed with a keener vivacity of expression,—apparently, they were informed by a quicker and finer intellect, as well as a gentler spirit.

Altogether, it was a thoughtful, a refined, and a benevolent countenance, that confronted Bergan; yet not without certain firm lines about the mouth to indicate that its owner could be decided, if he chose, and perhaps severe. While it invited liking, it commanded respect.

It was with real pleasure that Bergan made his self-introduction to a relative with so many apparent claims to affection and esteem. Yet, even while he mentioned his name and relationship, and held out his hand, as to a

stranger,—albeit a friend,—he was beset by an uneasy consciousness that he had met Mr. Bergan, or somebody very like him, before. But where? Sending a swift, retrospective glance through his life, he could find no clue to the perplexing feeling; and, having scant time for investigation, he quickly dismissed it as the offspring of some indefinite and elusive resemblance, perhaps to one of the ancestral portraits, perhaps to a half-forgotten acquaintance.

It was the more easily disposed of, that its place was soon filled by another shadowy vexation. His uncle's reception was both courteous and kind; yet he could not help feeling intuitively that it was lacking in some indefinable element of cordiality, even while he repudiated the intuition as a baseless figment of his own imagination. Certainly, there was no tangible coolness, not so much as a thin film of indifference, upon which to lay a plausible finger-tip; nothing that did not slip away from every attempt at analysis, and seem to resolve itself into a sickly humor of his own. At worst, he told himself, there was only some less definite expression of consanguineous sympathy, in the pressure of his uncle's hand, and in the modulations of his voice, than he had allowed himself to look for; and this was a mere matter of mood and temperament, the absence of which formed no good ground of complaint, whatever warmth and grace might have been contributed by its presence. No doubt, it would come in good time.

Meanwhile Doctor Remy, sending forth his keen glance from the shadowy end of the piazza, had recognized the new comer; and he now presented himself, hat in hand.

"The first meeting of near relatives," said he, with his indescribable mixture of seriousness and sarcasm, "is a scene upon which a third person is bound to pronounce his blessing, and—turn his back! Nay, no disclaimers; he is equally bound not to listen to them. Good evening, Mr. Bergan,—allow me to remark that good influences may

avail much in the matter that we were talking of. Good evening, Mr. Arling,—it gives me pleasure to leave you in such agreeable quarters ; Oakstead has manifold attractions, as you are in the way to discover.”

And the doctor bowed, and descended the steps.

Mr. Bergan turned to his nephew. “I hope you left my sister well,” said he.

“Quite well. I have a letter from her for you. I am ashamed that it has not been delivered before, but—”

Bergan hesitated ; a further explanation would take him upon delicate ground.

“Never mind the sequence of the ‘but,’” said his uncle, smiling, albeit a little gravely ;—“I am aware that the road from Bergan Hall to Oakstead is not so smooth as could be wished. I”—there was a slight hesitation, as if a colder phrase had been sought, and not found,—“I am glad that you were able to surmount its difficulties so soon. A letter from Eleanor !” he went on, with a sudden change of subject,—“that will be a treat indeed ! I take shame to myself that our correspondence has fallen into such desuetude. But what one ever did survive the lapse of forty-two years, without the reviving impulse of an occasional meeting ? I hardly dare venture a question about my sister’s family, lest I make some terrific blunder. I am not even sure about the present number of her children.”

“There are six of us left.”

“‘Left’ implies ‘taken,’” said Mr. Bergan, with a sigh.

“We have lost two of our number.”

“So have we,” replied Mr. Bergan. “But we have not six left—we have only one. However, she is a host in herself,—at least, we think so,”—he added, with a smile at his own enthusiasm. “But, will you come in and see your aunt and cousin ?”

He led the way to a small room, pleasantly furnished as a library ; and Bergan followed him, though not without a vague sense of a lurking reluctance and lukewarmness in

the invitation,—which he sternly smothered, nevertheless, as unworthy of himself and unjust to his uncle.

Stepping to an open French window, Mr. Bergan slightly raised his voice and called,—

“Carice!”

“Yes, father!” was the instant answer, in a voice of peculiar richness and melody; and the next moment a young girl stood in the window, with a light shawl wrapped round her slender figure, and her hands filled with autumn flowers, just gathered. The light was too dim to show her features clearly; but a certain indefinable freshness and sweetness seemed to enter the room with her and diffuse itself through the atmosphere not less perceptibly than the scent of the flowers. At sight of a stranger, imperfectly seen in the twilight obscurity of the room, she stopped abruptly.

“It is your cousin, Bergan Arling, the son of my sister Eleanor,” briefly explained her father.

There was a little start of surprise and of pleasure; then Carice dropped her flowers on the nearest table, and gave Bergan two cordial hands. Not only was there a charming grace in the unstudied action, but also the pleasant heart-warmth, the frank recognition of kinship and its appropriate sympathies, which Bergan had so unaccountably missed from his uncle’s manner, even while trying to persuade himself, either that it was there, or that its absence was no matter of surprise.

“Have I really a cousin, then!” said she, brightly. “I never believed it till now. That story of cousins at the West always sounded like a pleasant fiction to me,—I am glad to know that it is founded on fact.”

“On six facts,” said Bergan, smiling. “I am the fortunate representative of five other claimants to your cousinly regard.”

Carice laughingly shook her head. “I believe what I see,” said she,—“or rather what I should see, if it were not

so dim here. By and bye,—after I have ordered lights,—I may be able to reason from the seen to the unseen.” And she glided from the room, which seemed to grow suddenly dark and chill behind her.

Very shortly she returned, preceded by a servant bearing lights, and accompanied by her mother. Looking toward Bergan with a smile, she gave a slight start; the coming words were arrested on her parted lips; the color mounted to her brow; across her face went a swift ripple of disappointment and pain. Quickly recovering herself, she presented him to her mother; but the bright cordiality, the warm heart-glow, of her earlier manner, had faded, and came no more. It was as if a gray screen had suddenly been drawn before a cheery household fire.

Happily for Bergan, his aunt claimed his attention before he had time to feel the full dreariness of the change. She was a woman of rare tact, and much kindliness of heart, despite a somewhat stately manner, and a considerable degree of aristocratic chill for people not exactly in her “set.” She gave Bergan a warm welcome,—almost a motherly one; there was something about him that brought a softening remembrance of the two sons that slept in the family burial ground, and quietly opened the way for him into her heart. Finding his entertainment left very much in her hands, she cared for it kindly; though not without a secret wonder at the inexplicable indifference of her husband and daughter. But she did her best to make amends for it by her own friendliness, and in part, succeeded.

Meanwhile, Bergan was beset by another tantalizing resemblance. Never, he thought, had he seen anything quite so lovely as his cousin Carice,—with her soft, brown hair, her clear rose-complexion, her large, limpid, blue eyes, the lily-like droop of her exquisitely formed head, the inexhaustible grace of her attitudes and movements,—but he had certainly seen somebody a little like her. So strong, yet so puzzling was this conviction, and so frequent the glances

consequently sent in her direction, that he felt a word of explanation might not be amiss.

"Excuse me," said he, "if I seem to be looking at you almost constantly; but there is something about you curiously familiar, though it is impossible that we should have met before. I suppose I must have seen somebody that resembled you; but I cannot tell when or where."

Carice looked down, and colored slightly. Her father came to her relief.

"There is often no accounting for resemblances," said he. "When there is any tie of blood, however remote, we understand them, of course; but when the face of an utter stranger startles me in the street with the very smile of my sister Eleanor, or the grave look of my dead father, what am I to think?"

"One would like to know," remarked Bergan, "if there is a mental and moral likeness, to match the physical one. When I fix the resemblance that eludes me so persistently in you," he added, turning to Carice, "I hope it will help me to answer the question."

"I doubt if it does," replied Carice, quietly, yet not without a certain something in her tone that sounded almost like sarcasm. He looked at her in considerable surprise, but her eyes were turned away, and she said no more.

Feeling as if he were walking in a mist, which everywhere eluded his grasp, while it blinded his eyes, and chilled his heart, he rose to go.

"Let me see," said his aunt, kindly, as she gave him her hand, "to-morrow will be Sunday, will it not? Pray let us find you in our pew at church in the morning; and come home with us to an early dinner, before the evening service."

Bergan hesitated. He had no reasonable excuse; yet his uncle had not seconded the invitation. As if suddenly cognizant of the omission, Mr. Bergan now spoke.

"Come, by all means," said he, with more kindness than he had yet shown,—for he could not bring himself to give a half-hearted invitation to his sister's son,—“I have still a great deal to ask about your mother.”

"And I," said his aunt, laughing, "have still a great deal to ask about yourself. Good night."

They stood on the piazza watching him, until he was out of sight. Then Carice turned to her father.

"Did he say anything about—yesterday?" she asked, gravely.

"Not a word. I should have liked him better if he had offered some explanation."

"Perhaps he did not recognize us," suggested Carice.

"How could he help it?"

"I don't know,—only—you were angry and I was frightened; probably our faces did not wear their natural expression. Besides, he was doubtless a little bewildered by his fall, and—"

"What or whom are you talking about?" here broke in the amazed Mrs. Bergan.

"About my nephew, the mad cavalier who so nearly came into collision with Carice yesterday," replied her husband.

Mrs. Bergan threw up her hands. "And you let me invite him to dinner!" she exclaimed, in a tone of deep injury.

"How could I help it, my dear? Besides, he is my sister's son."

Meanwhile, Bergan found his way back to the village through the darkness, wondering what had become of the lightness of heart and cheerfulness of hope with which he had set out—he looked at his watch—only two hours before!

II.

STRENGTHENED OUT OF ZION.

ST. PAUL'S CHURCH, Berganton, was a small, plain structure of brick and stone, rather prettily situated on the bank of the aforesaid creek, which flowed through the midst of the town. Its sole claim to exterior beauty must have rested on the thick vines which covered its walls, framed its windows, and climbed to the roof of its low, square tower; doing their best to atone for its many architectural deficiencies, its failure to present to the eye a certain material "beauty of holiness," in harmony with the spiritual loveliness of the unseen temple, of which it was the faint type.

Toward this church, on the morning after his visit to Oakstead, Bergan directed his steps. Meeting his uncle in the vestibule, he was soon seated in the square family pew, and had a few moments to look about him, before service.

In its small way, the church was almost as much a memorial of the House of Bergan as the old Hall itself. Sir Harry had been a fair sample of the average English Churchman of his day, with whom a certain amount of religious observance was deemed necessary and becoming, both by way of seemly garmenting for one's self, and good example for one's neighbors. If it did not reach very deep into the heart, it at least imparted a certain completeness and dignity to the outward life.

Moreover, family tradition was strongly in religion's favor. There had always been relations of a highly friendly and decorous sort between the house and the church; and to have turned his back disrespectfully

upon the one, would have been to show himself a degenerate scion of the other. As a natural consequence, Sir Harry did not feel that he had done his whole duty to himself, or his posterity, until he had provided a fitting stage for the necessary family ceremonials of christening, marriage, and burial; as well as an appropriate spot for his own enjoyment of a respectable Sunday doze, under the soothing influence of an orthodox sermon, after having duly taken his share in the responses of the morning service. If this school of Churchmen had its faults, it also had its virtues. If its standard of religion was a low one, with a strong leaning toward human pride and selfish indulgence; it was better than the open irreverence and infidelity, the unblushing disregard of religious restraints and sanctions, of later generations.

Under Sir Harry's auspices, therefore, the foundations of St. Paul's were laid, and its walls arose, as a kind of necessary adjunct to Bergan Hall. And his successors, with rare exceptions, had felt it a duty to add to its interior attractions, as well as to make it a continuous family record, by memorial windows of stained glass, mural tablets of bronze or marble, and thank-offerings of font, communion plate, and other appliances and adornments. Some of these, no doubt, were merely self-laudatory, the fitful outgrowth of family pride; others might have sprung from a sense of what was beautiful and fitting,—which was a very good thing, as far as it went, though it went not much below the surface; but a few there were, doubtless, which had been consecrated to their use by heartfelt tears of sorrow, of penitence, or of gratitude. Be this as it may, they all helped (at least, in human eyes) to give the interior of St. Paul's a certain completeness, and even a degree of beauty and harmony.

Still, both in its size and its decorations, the church was far inferior to the Hall. There was a vast disproportion, both in amount and quality, between the space and the

furniture set apart for the service and pleasure of a single household, and that consecrated to the worship of God, and the spiritual nurture of His people. But, in the matter of preservation, as well as in answering a definite end, the advantage was greatly on the side of the church and its appointments. Wherever the Bergan hands had grown slack, or had been withdrawn, in *that* work, others had taken it up, for the love of Christ, and carried it forward to completion, or kept it from lapsing back into chaos.

And so, Bergan—remembering how surely the merely secular memorials of Sir Harry and his successors had been overtaken by the slow feet of decay, while these others had been saved by their connection with an institution having a deeper and broader principle of life—was led into a natural enough, though for him a most unusual, train of thought. He asked himself if Sir Harry would not have done better, even for his own selfish end, to have given the larger share (or, at least, an equal one) of his time, care, and money, to the edifice which had the surest hold upon permanency, and was most likely to be sacredly kept for its original purpose. In our country, more than almost anywhere else, people build houses for other people to dwell in, and Time delights to blot family names from his roll, at least on the page where they were first written. All family mansions, however fair and proud, are surely destined to fall into stranger hands, or to be given over to the Vandal occupation of decay. All families, of however lofty position, are certain to sojourn, at times, in the valley of humiliation, if they do not lose themselves in the deeper valley of extinction. Would it not have been better, then, to have foregone somewhat of the frail and faithless magnificence of Bergan Hall, and linked the dear family name and memory more closely with the indestructible institution which belongs to the ages?

And, as he thus questioned, the narrow walls, the low roof, and the insignificant adornments of the little church

seemed slowly to widen and lift themselves to the grand proportions of a vast, pillared temple; and the small chancel window—doing so little, nor doing that little well, to keep alive the fair memory of “Elizabeth, wife of Sir Harry”—became a great glory of pictured saints and angels, through whose diaphanous bodies the rainbow-light fell softly among a crowd of kneeling worshippers;—unto whom the sculptured mural tablets, the jewel-tinted glass, the stately walls, the soaring arch, told over and over again the lovely story, and held up to view the noble example, of a race whose labor and delight it had been to build strong and beautiful the walls of Zion; and which, in so doing, had raised up to itself the most enduring, as well as the most precious of earthly monuments. How much better this than the crumbling splendors of Bergan Hall, and the fading glory of an almost extinct name!

“The Lord is in His holy temple,” was here breathed through Bergan’s visioned fane, in appropriately awed and solemn tones. Nevertheless, they broke the slender thread of its being. As Bergan rose to his feet, with the rest of the congregation, its majestic vista, its pictured windows, and all its rich array, vanished like the filmy imagery of a dream, at the moment of awakening. But it was not without a keen sense of the contrast that he brought his mind back to the real St. Paul’s, and the service going on under its lowlier roof.

Nothing remained but the harmonious voice, which had at once perfected and broken the spell. Glancing toward the chancel, Bergan saw a clergyman, with a face that would have been simply benignant, but for the vivid illumination of a pair of deep-set, dark-blue eyes,—a light never seen save where a great heart sends its warm glow through all the chambers of a grand intellect.

There is something marvellous in the inexhaustible adaptation of the Church service to the wants of the soul. At the same time that it is a miracle of fitness for the ends

of public worship, it has its adequate word for every secret, individual need. Though Bergen had heard it hundreds of times before, and always with a hearty admiration of its beauty and comprehensiveness, never had its rhythmic sentences fallen upon his heart with such gracious and grateful effect. Doubtless, this was owing, in great measure, to the subdued frame of mind induced by the events of the last week; but it was also due, in some degree, to the perfection with which the service was rendered. It was neither hurried nor drawled, neither grumbled nor whined, neither a rasping see-saw nor a dull monotone. It was not overlaid with the arts of elocution; nor was it robbed of all life and warmth by the formal emphasis and intonation of the merely correct reader. But, in Mr. Islay's mouth, it became the living voice of living hearts. The dear old words, without losing one whit of the accumulated power, and the sacred associations, of long years of reverent use, came as freshly and as fervently from the speaker's lips, as if they were the heart-warm coinage of the moment.

As an inevitable consequence, Bergen's responses were uttered with answering fervor. And how perfectly they met his wants! How wonderfully they expressed his sense of weakness and failure, his depression and humiliation, his new-born self-distrust, his earnest desire and determination to be stronger against future temptations. In some sentences, there was a depth of meaning and of fitness, that seemed to have been waiting all these years for this moment of complete interpretation. Continually was he startled by subtle references to his peculiar circumstances, by the calm precision with which his sores were probed, and the tender skill which applied to them healing balm.

Especially was he struck by the Collect for the day,—so clearly did it express thoughts and feelings too vague in his own mind to have shaped themselves into words:—

“O Lord, we beseech Thee, absolve Thy people from

their offences; that through Thy bountiful goodness, they may all be delivered from the bands of those sins which by their frailty they have committed."

Never before could he have so clearly understood what was meant by the "bands" of sins, committed, not of deliberate intent, but through frailty. How painfully he felt the pressure of those bands! how certainly they would cramp his efforts and hinder his progress! And how singularly distinct they had become to his sight, both in their nature and their effects, by means of that old, oft-repeated, yet ever new, Collect!

With a half-unconscious attempt at divination, Bergan turned over the leaves of his Prayer Book, during the short pause before the psalm, wondering what other mystic meanings were waiting under familiar words, for his future needs. It was not without a little chill at his heart that his eye caught the opening sentences of the burial anthem.

There could be no question about *that*. Whatever else might or might not be waiting for him, that was certain, some day, to be said over his dead body, and vainly to try to find entrance into his deaf ears. But when? At the end of a long life; in the midst of his days; or ere his work was scarce begun?

His work. What was it? To walk in a vain shadow? To disquiet himself in vain? To heap up riches for an unknown gatherer? To write his name high on the temple of Fame? To become a philanthropist, or a reformer? No; but to "apply his heart unto wisdom."

It was both a deep and a hard saying. Bergan felt that he could not fathom it, even while he saw how ruthlessly it struck at the roots of human pride, and lopped the boughs of personal ambition.

Meanwhile, the psalm had been sung, and with a rustling of leaves and garments, the congregation had settled themselves into their seats. Through the succeeding hush, Mr. Islay quietly sent the words of his text: "Whatsoever

thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor *wisdom*, in the grave whither thou goest."

It was the word in season !

Bergan left the church that day, not only with a deeper sense of his own mortality, and consequent weakness, than ever before; but also with a modified view of life's work and duty. In one sense, it was a narrower view,—with that narrowness which feels the need of some true, fixed centre, from which to work outward, with any degree of safety and system, and, consequently, of success. He began to see that he who would influence others for good, and through them the world, must first be certain of the point where his influence begins, and that toward which it tends.

Not that Bergan understood, or would ever be likely to understand, the full measure and real character of the change that had been wrought in him under that lowly church-roof. Up to this point, his life had been from without, inward; henceforth, it was to be from within outward. The inner life of the soul was really begun in him,—feebly, half-unconsciously, it is true,—yet possessing a hidden power of assimilation and growth, that would soon bend all things to itself. Storm and sunshine, darkness and light, success and failure, would alike minister to its wants, and help it to grow fair and strong. Things most inimical to it, at first sight, would but give it tougher fibre and lovelier grain; in the drought, it would but send its roots down deeper in pursuit of hidden wells; under the pruning-knife, it would but burst forth into fairer blossoms and richer fruit.

Yet it was no sudden change, for all his life had been a preparation for it. Oftenest the kingdom of God cometh without observation. The stones of the spiritual temple may be fashioned amid clamor and discord, but they are laid in their places with a silence that is full of meaning.

III.

SEEING, BUT UNDERSTANDING NOT.

THE service being ended, Bergan naturally turned to his kinsfolk for an ampler and friendlier greeting than had been possible at their hurried meeting in the crowded vestibule. Especially—with a grateful remembrance of her yesterday's cordiality—did he look to his aunt for a word of familiar kindness, that should make him feel less alone, less of a stranger, amid the friendly chorus of salutations and leave-takings coming to his ears from the departing congregation. But, to his surprise and pain, the same indefinable chill which had made him so vaguely uncomfortable with her husband and daughter, had now taken possession of her also, and woven a thin film of ice over the manner that yesterday was so kind.

The change was so unaccountable that he could not believe in it. He told himself that the real thing at fault was his own sickly imagination, that he was morbidly sensitive, as well as foolishly exacting. He convinced his understanding, but could not silence his heart. That Cassandra of the depths continually smote his unwilling ear with her lugubrious voice, calling upon him to observe how strangely Mrs. Bergan had been transformed overnight, from the interested, cordial, even affectionate aunt, into the polite and practised woman of the world, doing merely what courtesy required for the entertainment of the guest that circumstances had flung upon her hands.

In this state of affairs, Bergan would gladly have exchanged the dinner at Oakstead for a quiet afternoon in his room and a sober talk with his thoughts. But the invita-

tion being already accepted, he must needs abide by the event. Accordingly, he took the vacant seat in his uncle's carriage, and was soon set down at the cottage steps.

Before dinner, the two gentlemen were left to a quiet chat by themselves on the cool, shady piazza. Bergan embraced this opportunity to explain, more fully than he had yet done, his motives and aims. He told his uncle,—a little proudly, it might be, for he wished it to be understood that he had come hither with a self-respecting purpose of independence, and not with any idea of leaning upon his friends,—he told his uncle that his choice of Berganton as the starting-point of his professional career, was due to the influence of his mother. Her childhood's home, and its vicinity, had always kept a tenacious hold on her affections, despite the fact that more than two-thirds of her womanhood had been spent elsewhere, and all the deeper joys and sorrows of her life had blossomed and fruited in different soil. When, therefore, it became necessary for one of her sons to go out into the world, in search of a better field of labor than was afforded in his native village, her thoughts naturally turned to the spot so haloed in her memory, and where her ancestry had sent such deep, old roots into the soil, as to create a kind of kinship for evermore between their descendants and the locality. It would be a pleasant thing for Bergan, she thought, to make a home and a name for himself in a place where he possessed so strong a claim to residence; it would be equally pleasant for the old town to recognize the familiar mould of features and character in its streets; and it would be pleasantest of all for herself to know that her son was with her kinsfolk, amid well-known scenes, rather than among strangers, on ground where her thoughts could find no foothold. Some day, she hoped to visit him there, and feed her mother's pride upon his success, at the same time that she renewed her girlhood amid old associations.

Bergan then touched lightly upon his disappointment in

the dull old town—finding it so much duller and older, even to decrepitude, than he had expected, and consequently, so little eligible to his purpose. And here, if he had been met by a more interested glance, and a fuller sympathy, he would have gone on to speak of the disgraceful scene into which he had been betrayed by his uncle—the Major—and the obligation under which he felt himself placed thereby to remain in Berganton, at least long enough to efface any unfavorable impression which it might have caused. But, though his uncle Godfrey heard him patiently and courteously enough, there was so little of the hearty interest of kinship in his manner, that Bergan could not bring himself to open the subject. Not only was it unpleasant in itself, but it touched at many points on deep things of his nature, which instinctively refused to pour themselves into any but a friendly, sympathetic ear.

If he had known whence came the cloud between his relatives and himself, he would have spoken, as a matter of course, at whatever cost of feeling. But this explanation of the matter suggested itself to him, only to be inevitably rejected. Although it might serve to account for the coolness that had characterized his uncle's manner from the first, it seemed to throw no light whatever upon the difficult problem of the sudden change from cordiality to reserve, in Mrs. Bergan and Carice. A much more natural supposition appeared to be, that something in his own manner or conversation had unfortunately awakened prejudice or created dislike. For that, there was no remedy save in time. He could hope that, when his kinsfolk should come to know him better, they might be fain to reverse their hasty judgment, and account him worthy of a place in their liking. But, until that time should arrive,—though he would do anything in reason to help it on,—there was nothing to encourage or to warrant any overflow of personal confidences.

It was scarcely possible, under the circumstances, that

Bergan should have reached a different conclusion. Of his meeting with Mr. Bergan and Carice, during his frenzy of rage and intoxication, he retained but the vaguest recollection ; and he had totally failed to recognize either his uncle or cousin as his co-actors in the dim and misty adventure. Nor was this the only missing link in the chain of events. Dr. Remy's casual talk, in the visit immediately preceding his own, which had first made Mr. Bergan acquainted with the fact of his nephew's presence in the neighborhood, and gradually led to his identification with the intoxicated cavalier of whom he entertained so disagreeable an impression ; Carice's subsequent recognition of him, as soon as his features were distinctly revealed to her ; and his aunt's later discovery of the same lamentable identity ;—all these facts were necessary to a clear understanding of the situation, and its requirements. Without them, no wonder that Bergan was led astray both in his conclusions and his acts ; the former being the inevitable result of the false logic of the few facts of which he knew, and the latter going to help the equally false logic of the facts known to others, of which he knew nothing.

So, after Mr. Bergan had politely assented to his observations upon the dulness of Berganton, and somewhat pointedly remarked that perseverance and energy, when conjoined with upright habits, were pretty sure to command a reasonable measure of success anywhere, the conversation turned aside into other channels. The opportunity for a frank explanation—which could alone have placed him upon his proper footing with his new-found relatives—was lost. It would not return until it was too late to be of any considerable service.

Nevertheless, at the dinner-table, the moral atmosphere cleared a little. Mr. Bergan could not, in justice to himself, allow any guest at his board—much less his sister's son—to shiver long in an impalpable mist of coolness and reserve. His wife gladly seconded his efforts toward geni-

ality and cheerfulness. Under this opportune sunshine, Bergan's manner soon lost its reflected touch of constraint, and sparkled with pleasant humor, or was warmed through and through with a rich glow of enthusiasm. Despite their prejudices, his relatives could not but feel its potent charm. Under protest, as it were, they yielded him a portion of their liking, even while they refused him their confidence. "What a pity," they thought, "that he is so dissipated, when he can be so captivating! What a fine character his might be, but for its one miserable, ruinous flaw!"

Especially was this thought prominent in the mind of Carice, as she listened delightedly to the pleasant flow of his talk, and her youthful enthusiasm involuntarily sprang forward to meet his. Two or three times, he caught her eyes fixed upon him with an expression that not only puzzled, but pained him. But for the absurdity of the supposition, he would have said that it was pity!

In the hope of finding a clue to the mystery, he took a position near her, when they rose from the table,—leaning with an easy grace against the mantel, while she occupied the low window-seat,—and the two were soon deep in a conversation of absorbing interest. Beginning with books, it slowly led, by the way of the morning's service and sermon, up to vital questions of duty and morals. In its course, it developed so many points of sympathy between the colloquists,—such happy correspondence of opinion, without lifeless unanimity,—so many dove-tailed segments of thought, glad to meet in close and completing union,—that Mr. and Mrs. Bergan, listening, at first, with indulgent interest, finally began to exchange uneasy glances, and, at length, withdrew to the piazza for a hurried consultation.

For this fair daughter of theirs—this blue-eyed Carice, with the lily-like *pose*, and the rose-like face—was their idol. Not specially congenial on other points, they were yet made one by their engrossing devotion to her. She was at once their exceeding joy and their exquisite pain.

Although she had scarcely been ill a day in her life, she had a seeming delicacy of constitution that kept them in a constant quake of terror. She had also a sensitiveness of temperament, as well as a singular purity and simplicity of character, that filled them with nameless forebodings for her happiness. All their days were spent in keeping safe watch and ward between her and the first threatenings of evil, of whatever nature. Every coming shadow, every adverse influence, was foreseen or forefelt, and turned aside, before it could reach her.

Especially, of late,—seeing her continual growth in loveliness, of a character at once so rare and so attractive,—they had charged themselves with the duty of watching against any unwise bestowal of her affections, and consequent misery. And, up to this time, there had been no cause for alarm. But now, as Mrs. Bergan glanced back through the window at the rapt talker and listener, noting the earnestness and heightened color of the one, and the unwonted brightness half-hidden under the drooping lashes of the other, she turned to her husband with an anxiety that needed no further explanation.

“They are cousins, remember,” said Mr. Bergan, snatching at the first thread of hope, though not without a sufficient sense of its fragility.

“Only half-cousins, at best,—or rather, at worst,” replied his wife. “And so utterly different in type and temperament, that the relationship could never be set up as an insurmountable barrier. Besides, having never met before, they now meet as strangers.”

“Then it will not do to encourage him in coming here,” said Mr. Bergan, after a pause. “I could never give Carice to a drunkard, though he were fifty times as handsome and talented.”

At this moment, Carice, awaking as from a dream, looked round for her parents. Seeing them on the piazza, she quickly rose, and came toward them, followed by Ber-

gan. There was something in the action inexpressibly reassuring to the troubled spectators. The engrossing spell of the young man's conversation was so suddenly broken, when she missed her father and mother from her side! They looked at each other with a smile, and Mrs. Bergan playfully whispered,—

“I suspect that we are two fools!”

Nevertheless, enough of the effect of these few moments of parental anxiety remained, to fling a slight shadow over the party. Carice felt it first, in her quick sympathy with all her parents' moods; and Bergan caught it from her as speedily as if there were already some invisible bond between the two. Without knowing why, he very soon became aware that the atmosphere was again growing chill around him. He had been basking, not in a broad glory of summer, but only in a flicker of winter sunshine.

Under these circumstances, Mr. Bergan's announcement that it was time to set forth for the five o'clock service, was heard as a relief. Almost immediately, however, it was followed by an unreasoning pang of regret. It needed no soothsayer to tell him that moments like those just passed, were to be rare in his immediate experience of life.

Dusk was fast gathering in the corners and under the arches of the little church, when the service was over. Parting with his relatives at the door, Bergan went his solitary way to his lodgings, through the deepening twilight. He walked slowly, not that the road was so pleasant, but because the end had so little attraction. The walls and furniture of his room were still strangers to him;—no one corner would allure him with a more familiar charm than another, no particular chair would draw him irresistibly to its accustomed arms, no sweet, tangled crop of associations would fling their mingled light and shadow across the floor. It would all be dim, blank, lonely. And the foot falls but heavily on the path, the termination of which neither satisfies habit nor excites imagination!

Nevertheless, the slowest progress brings one quickly to the end, if the journey be short; and Bergan's lingering steps brought him to Mrs. Lyte's gate ere the dusk had deepened into total obscurity. Entering the wide hall, which extended through the whole depth of the house, he saw Mrs. Lyte seated at the farther end, in a doorway opening on the garden. Her little daughter Cathie was sobbing at her side, in what seemed an uncontrollable passion of grief and indignation. The child's protector and playmate, a half-superannuated old mastiff, named Nix, sat on his haunches at a little distance, watching the scene with sympathetic, intelligent eyes.

Cathie was already Bergan's fast friend. During yesterday's work of arrangement, she had at first hovered around him at a distance; then, yielding to the unconscious fascination of the young man's look and smile, as well as the irresistible attraction of the litter of books and papers, she had drawn nearer; later on, she had eagerly favored him with the somewhat questionable help of her small fingers, and the amusing chatter of her tireless tongue; and she had ended by giving him all her childish confidence, and a large share of her freakish affections.

Freakish—because Cathie was a sort of elf-child;—or it might be truer to say that, in her small compass, there were many elf-children; manifesting their several individualities through her changeable moods, and sending their various gleam through the almost weird splendor of her dark eyes. She could be wild and tender, playful and passionate, wise and simple, by turns; or in such quick and capricious succession that she seemed to be all at once. She took as many shapes, in her flittings about the house, as there were hours in the day;—now a teasing sprite, now a dancing fairy,—at this moment, a tender human child, melting into your arms with dewey kisses,—the next, a mocking elf, slipping from your grasp like quicksilver, and leaving you with a doubt if there could be anything

human about her,—and anon, a fiery little demon, with enough of concentrated rage in her small frame to suffice for a giant.

It was in this latter phase that she was now exhibiting herself.

“I won’t believe it!” she screamed, clenching her small fists, and jumping up and down in a fury of excitement. “I won’t believe it! It isn’t true! Miss Ferrars is a—”

“Hush!” said the mother, softly, hearing the sound of Bergan’s step.

—“A mean, lying old maid!” went on Cathie, without an instant’s hesitation. “I wish I had told her so! I will, when I see her again!”

“Hush!” said the mother again, more decidedly; laying her hand over the rebellious mouth, by way of enforcing the mandate.

But Cathie broke from her, and ran towards Bergan. At a few paces distant, she stopped and underwent one of her sudden metamorphoses; the convulsive fury left her features, and in its stead, there came a grave sorrow and wistfulness, piteous to behold. Fixing her dark, bright eyes full on Bergan’s face, she solemnly asked,—

“*Are* you bad, Mr. Arling? Tell me, are you really a bad man?”

Whatever mistakes Bergan may have made, in his life, or may make hereafter,—whatever sins he may commit, through ignorance, or in sudden passion,—let it be remembered, to his credit, that he could meet those clear, innocent, child-eyes, without a blush, and answer the question as gravely and simply as it had been asked,—

“No, Cathie, I do not think that I am.”

The truthful accents found their instant way to the child’s heart. Her confidence—which, in truth, had really never been lost—was restored fourfold. She threw herself into his arms, and laid her young cheek against his, in a lov-

ing attempt to atone for the wrong that had been done him. Nix came also, and rubbed his great head against the young man's knee, with an apparent understanding of the whole matter.

Nor was the child's mind the only one to which Bergan's words had brought quick conviction. Hearing his low, grave tones of denial, Mrs. Lyte felt a weight lifted from her spirits. She had just been listening to the story of Bergan's intoxication, with adornments, brought by a gossiping neighbor, and her heart had sunk with fear lest trouble and discomfort had found their way under her roof, with the new inmate. But seeing him thus acquitted by the child and the dog,—two most unprejudiced judges, she thought,—she quietly dismissed her fears. For, though so gentle and shrinking in manner as to give the impression of having no character at all, Mrs. Lyte was yet quite capable of forming an independent opinion, and of abiding by it.

So, when Bergan came toward her, leading Cathie by the hand, she did not hesitate to point him to a seat.

"Your room must be lonely," said she, kindly. "Will you sit with us for awhile?"

But Bergan did not heed, if he heard, the invitation. He merely looked his hostess in the eyes, and said ;—

"Mrs. Lyte, will you be so kind as to tell me what made Cathie ask me that question just now?"

"Certainly, if you wish it. But, Mr. Arling, the subject was closed, for me, with her question and your answer. Would it not be as well for you to let it rest there, also?"

Bergan only shook his head. And after a moment's study of his grave face, Mrs. Lyte, very quietly, as if it were a matter in which she had no concern, mentioned the report that had been brought her. As quietly, Bergan told her the whole story of his stay at the Hall :—doing so the more readily, it needs not to be said to those any wise skilled in the intricacies of the human mind, because he felt that it was not required of him. For, though Mrs. Lyte listened with the kindest

interest and sympathy, she took care to show by her manner that she did so more to satisfy him than herself. In matters like this, she was accustomed to trust her instincts more implicitly than her reason ; and she was wise enough to know that trust is the short road to truth, in all characters not radically bad.

And thus, with the singular inconsequence of human life, the explanation was made where it was not needed, and left unspoken where it would have availed much against future misunderstanding, trouble, wrong, and sorrow !

IV.

PATIENT WAITING.

FIVE or six weeks now glided slowly by, without working any change in either the circumstances or the relations of the characters with whom this history has to do. Bergan still shivered in the chill remoteness of position into which he had been flung, partly by his fault and partly by his misfortune. Not only between him and his relatives, but dividing him from the whole reputable outside world, there seemed to be a gulf fixed, impassable save to formal courtesies and commonplace usages. Anything warmer, more personal, more exacting, sought in vain for an eligible crossing place; and, if it leaped the gray chasm, it was only to lose itself among chill, elusive shapes of mist, on the opposite side.

Thus excluded from the only society for which he cared, Bergan did not, as a weaker character might have done, betake himself for consolation to the lower circles of vice and dissipation that would have welcomed him rapturously. He could better afford to stand alone, he thought, than to throw himself into arms whose embrace would soil, and whose seeming support was an insidious undermining. Besides, it was much more in accordance with his character to regard the exclusion from which he suffered as a challenge to be answered, an adversary to be overcome, rather than a verdict to be acquiesced in. He would prove to the world that it had been mistaken.

Day after day, therefore, he spent in his office,—as many a new-fledged lawyer has done before him,—waiting with what patience he might for the clients that never came, and

reading hard, by way of preparation for the cases that never presented themselves. It was dull and lonely work ; yet it did him good service, in giving him time for thought and reflection, and in making him acquainted with his own resources of will, courage, patience, and energy.

The only persons who came within the circle of loneliness that surrounded him, were Mrs. Lyte, Cathie, and Dr. Remy. The first showed him much gentle, unobtrusive kindness, chiefly manifesting itself in a motherly oversight of his rooms and prevision of his wants. The second fluttered in and out of his office, like a bird or a butterfly, affording him much amusing, and often opportune, distraction from hard study or sober-hued thought. But neither of these two, for obvious reasons, could give him just the close, helpful friendship, of which he stood in need.

Neither did he find it in Dr. Remy. Though he met the physician daily, and often engaged with him in hour-long colloquies upon all sorts of topics, he never felt that he really knew him any better than on the first day of their acquaintance. The doctor's peculiar frankness, which had seemed, at first sight, to promise such facility of intimacy, proved to be really more of the nature of an elastic barrier, yielding everywhere to the slightest pressure, but nowhere completely giving way. Or, it might be still more fitly characterized as a deceitful quagmire, wherein the curious explorer sank indefinitely, but never touched solid bottom.

Not that the doctor was at all reticent in regard to the main facts of his outward life. In a desultory way he had furnished Bergan with a sufficiently distinct outline sketch of his somewhat eventful career, up to the present moment,—a career which, for shifts and turns, outdid that of *Gil Blas*. According to this, he was born in New Orleans, the posthumous son of a French refugee, by an American wife. When he was twelve years old, his mother had presented him with a stepfather. The gift proved so little to his taste that, two years later, he ran away from the pair, and flung him-

self into that El Dorado of boyish imagination—life at sea. In one capacity or another, during the next twelve years, he not only contrived to visit most of the countries of Europe, but also by dint of natural aptitude for study, to pick up a language or two, and to acquaint himself with the essential part of a college curriculum. It now occurred to him to return to New Orleans, and claim the modest patrimony awaiting him there, in the hands of his father's executors. He found that his stepfather had been dead for three or four years, and his mother, after having exhausted her own scanty resources, was sinking, with her two children, into the dreary depths of poverty. It cost her some effort to recognize the slender stripling of her memory in the brown, bearded, broad-shouldered man, who now presented himself before her as her son. However, his identity was satisfactorily established, both by certain indisputable personal marks, and by the presumptive evidence of his willingness to assume the burden of her support.

His next step had been to place himself in a lawyer's office, where, in virtue of close application, he made months do the work of years. Admitted by-and-by to the Bar, he had practised his profession for a brief space, but finding the legal life not wholly to his taste, he had flung it aside; and with the ready facility which had characterized his whole career, had betaken himself to the study and the practice of medicine. Here, he averred, he had found his true vocation, the rightful mistress of his intellect, and should undergo no more transformations, and indulge in no more wanderings.

So far, Dr. Remy gave quite as frank an account of himself as could be expected or desired. But when it came to his inner life of thought, opinion, principle, his frankness was of the sort that obscures, rather than explains. It put forth jest and earnest, reason and sophistry, airy spirituality and dead materialism, with equal readiness, and with as much show of interest in one as the other. If Bergan

caught at what seemed to be substance, it turned to shadow in his grasp. If he grappled with apparent earnest, it quickly resolved itself into a hollow helmet of sudden championship, or a thin mask of irony. He was often startled with a doubt whether the doctor had any settled opinions or principles. He pulled down, but he built not up; he attacked, but he rarely defended,—or, if he defended a thing to-day, more likely than not, he would assault it to-morrow. All Bergan's own opinions and beliefs seemed to lose their consistency in the universal solvent of the doctor's talk, and only took shape again after a protracted process of precipitation, in his own mind and heart.

If the latter organ made any part of Doctor Remy's bodily system, it never manifested itself to Bergan by any noticeable throb or sensible warmth. The young man was often puzzled by the question whence came the doctor's evident interest in himself, since it seemed so plain that it did not spring from any warm personal liking. He felt himself to be the object of his careful study, frequently; of his spontaneous affection and sympathy, never. He could not but wonder at such an amount and duration of a purely intellectual interest,—for such he decided it to be,—when it promised so little result.

However, the doctor's was the only society, worthy of the name, that was offered to him; his, too, the only friendship, or semblance thereof, that came within his reach. He gratefully availed himself of both, even while conscious that neither fully met his wants, or would have been the object of his deliberate choice. Without this resource, the flow of Bergan's life would have been characterized by a drearier monotony, even, than at present.

The first slight break in its placid current, occurred one morning, on his return from breakfasting at the hotel. To his surprise, Vic was tied before Mrs. Lyte's gate, arching her neck, and twisting her ears about, in her usual wild and nervous fashion. In most confiding proximity

to her restless heels, Brick lay fast asleep on the sunshiny sward.

Roused by the sound of approaching footsteps, the latter sprang to his feet, and donned the palm-leaf *débris* that he termed his hat, in time to doff it in deferential acknowledgment of Bergan's surprised greeting.

"Why, Brick! how do you do? Is anything the matter at the Hall?"

"No, massa Harry, nothing 't all. Only, ole massa, he say we's gittin lazy,—Vic an' me;—an' he tought you'd better be gettin' some good out ob us, dan to leab us in de stable—no, I mean, in the cabin, no, one in de stable and turrer in de cabin—a-eatin' our heads off;—dat's jes' what he said, massa. So he clared us off in a hurry, an' tole us to gib you his lub, and tell you dat he 'sposed you'd kinder forgotten 'bout us."

There could be no question but that the overture was kindly meant, on the Major's part, but it was one that Bergan could not possibly accept. Judging from present indications, it would be long before his professional income would suffice for his own support, to say nothing of the additional expense of a servant and horse. Besides, he had never regarded either Brick or the filly as actual gifts, but only convenient loans, for his use while at the Hall. Any other view of the matter would, by no means, have suited his independent character. And, if this had been the case before the rupture with his uncle, it was doubly so, now. Major Bergan must not be suffered to think that his resentment had given way, or that his good will had been restored, by the aid of any gifts, however valuable, or kindly bestowed.

Yet he would be glad to send his uncle a friendly message, to show that he was really grateful for his kindness, and ready to accept any overture which would not burden him with too heavy a sense of obligation. To ensure its safe delivery, without the risk of hopeless travesty, at Brick's hands, he went to his desk, and wrote:

“DEAR UNCLE: Thank you for sending me your love; *that* is a thing which I am glad to get and keep. But I cannot keep either Brick or Vic,—I have no present use for them, and no means of providing for them, if I had. Besides, I never regarded either as mine, except while I remained at the Hall. Many thanks, all the same, for your kind intentions.

“Your affectionate nephew,

‘HARRY.’”

The signature was written only after considerable hesitation. His note would be sure to fail of the desired conciliatory effect, if it wholly ignored the name upon which his uncle had so strenuously insisted. Yet he could not bring himself to incorporate it with his lawful sign-manual. He was forced to compromise matters by thus using it as a sort of *sobriquet*.

Giving the note to Brick, he bade him take it straightway to his master. The negro's face instantly fell; then, it brightened again with the light of a plausible explanation.

“I 'spec I'se to come back, arter I'se 'livered it?” he asked, anxiously.

“No, Brick,” Bergan gravely answered. “I cannot afford to keep you; it is as much as I can do, just now, to keep myself.”

“But, massa Harry,” remonstrated Brick, “don't you know I 'longs to you? I'se your nigger, sure as deff; ole massa gib me to you, an' tole me to wait on you, don' you 'member? An' how's I a goin' to wait on you, I'd jes' like to know, wid tree good miles atween us? 'Sides, I'd feel so mortify to go right back dar, like a dog dat don' own no massa, arter I done tole 'em all I's coming to lib wid you.”

It was not without difficulty that Brick was convinced of the inevitableness of his return to Major Bergan. Not

only did his heart yearn to be in the service of his young master, but he was fully persuaded that he could help, rather than hinder, his fortunes. He forcibly expressed his willingness to work his fingers off in the cause, and gravely proposed to put himself on a course of semi-starvation, in the matter of "keep." All this being of no avail, he was finally forced to mount Vic, and turn homeward, a picture of the blackest despair.

On the way, his mind was illumined with a gleam of hope. Like all the negroes of the plantation, he had large faith in the occult power of old Rue. His present journey, he well knew, was mainly owing to her influence. If she could be made to see the propriety of his immediate return to Bergan's service, as he did, no doubt she could find a way to bring it to pass. And her conversion to his views could be effected, he shrewdly thought, by a skilful use of Bergan's confession of straitened circumstances, as well as a certain suggestive increase of gravity that he had observed in the young man's manner. His smile had not come quite so readily and brightly to his lips as in the old days at Bergan Hall. No doubt he was poor, lonely, and troubled. He needed some one to take care of him, and watch over him. And who so eligible to this position as himself? For Brick had inherited his grandmother's devotion to the Bergan blood, and believed that the chief end of his being was to live and die loyally in its service. Moreover, his young master had not only taken tenacious hold of his affections, but also of that still stronger faculty of the negro mind—his imagination. Though he might be a distressed knight, just at present, Brick's faith was firm that his time of triumph was not far off; and then, he wanted to be "there to see!"

He lost no time, therefore, in presenting himself before Rue, on his arrival at Bergan Hall. And so dexterously did he work upon her love and pride, by the deplorable picture that he drew of Bergan's sadness and poverty, that

the faithful old nurse straightway betook herself to her master, and never left him till she had persuaded him to mount his horse, and set forth, at a brisk trot, toward Berganton.

In truth, the Major was only too glad to be so persuaded. His anger towards his nephew had quickly burned out, by reason of its own fury; and in thinking the matter over, he had come to be more tickled by the young man's prowess than he had, at first, been displeased by his flight.

"You should have seen him knocking those fellows around, like so many ninepins!" he exclaimed, exultingly, to Rue. "I couldn't have done it more neatly myself, in my best days. I tell you, he is a true Bergen at bottom, if he has got a few crinks and cranks at top. What a pity he could not make up his mind to stay quietly on the old place, where he belongs; and which he might have done what he pleased with, if he had only taken me on the right tack! But he'll come back—he'll come back! Estates like Bergen Hall don't grow on every bush. It won't take him long to find out that he can't raise one from the law. And then, he'll be glad to come back to me; and I'll receive him as the father did the prodigal son!"

But, as time rolled on, and Bergen did not appear to claim this welcome, the Major began to feel a chagrin that would quickly have been intensified into anger, but for the happy suggestion that the young man delayed merely because he was dubious as to his reception. This view of the matter was an excellent salve to whatever of bitter or wounded feeling the Major still retained. Bergen longing, yet fearing, to return to him, was a vision that gently soothed his pride, while it appealed powerfully to his sympathies.

Matters having reached this point, he yielded easily to Rue's suggestion that Bergen's horse and servant should be sent to him, as a hint that hostilities had ceased. And though their prompt return was, at first, new matter of

wrath, Bergan's note, Brick's report, and Rue's representations and entreaties, availed to smother the half-kindled flame, and send him forth toward Berganton in a most forgiving and patronizing frame of mind. He was ready to make any concessions to his nephew's principles and habits. If Bergan would but return to the Hall, he might dictate his own terms, and order his life in his own way. The Major had missed him more than he would have been willing to allow. The old place had not seemed the same without him. Its present had lost a strong element of cheer and energy, and its future had faded into dimness.

Arriving, in due time, at Mrs. Lyte's gate, the Major dismounted, and was about to enter, when his eyes fell on the little tin plate, in Bergan's office window, which has before been mentioned. If it had been the head of Medusa, with all its supernatural powers intact, it could scarcely have wrought a more complete change in the expression of his face. First, he glared at it in incredulous wonder; then, he nearly choked with inarticulate rage; finally, words came to his relief. To the consternation of Mrs. Lyte, and the intense gratification of the crowd of boys and negroes which quickly gathered at a safe distance, he proceeded to pour forth a volley of the bitterest curses that he could frame upon the author of what he chose to consider an insult to himself, and a disgrace to his lineage.

"That I should live to see the name of Bergan on a snip of a tin sign, like that!" he growled, shaking his fist at the offending plate, and trembling with rage;—"what right had the scoundrel to put it there, I should like to know? 'Attorney at Law,' indeed!—he shall have law enough, since he likes it so well! I'll sue him for trespass, libel, forgery,—I'll horsewhip him, and then have him indicted for assault and battery,—I'll—." But here his indignation choked him, for a moment.

Recovering his voice, his anger took a new direction.

“ ‘Bergan Arling,’ indeed ! ” he muttered,—“ I suppose he was ashamed of the ‘Harry,’ though he could put it at the end of his note,—smooth-faced hypocrite that he is ! Where is he ? ” he went on, lifting his voice. “ Why don’t he come out, and face me, like a man ? Must I go in and drag him out, by the nape of the neck,—the mean, sneaking, insulting puppy ! ”

“ Mr. Arling is out, I regret to say,” said Dr. Remy, appearing in the doorway, and confronting the furious Major with his cool, cynical smile. “ He went out for a walk some fifteen or twenty minutes ago. If he were here, no doubt it would give him great pleasure to meet you.”

Major Bergan scowled in a way to show how willingly he would transfer his wrath to this timely object, if he could only find a reasonable excuse. But, discovering not the shadow of one in the doctor’s polite, careless manner, he contented himself with growling,—

“ Out, is he ? I wish he were out of the county—and a good riddance ! When will he be in ? ”

“ Not under an hour or two,” answered the doctor, wisely postponing the era of Bergan’s return to the utmost limit.

“ Umph ! that’s the way he spends his time, is it ? loafing about the country when he should be in his office ! Well, I’ve got something to do, besides wait for him. Just tell him, will you ? that I owe him a good, sound horse-whipping, and I’ll pay it to him the first time I meet him.”

“ I will take charge of your kind message with pleasure,” returned the doctor, blandly. “ Any further commands ? ”

“ No ! ” roared the Major, with a dim suspicion that he was being made to appear ridiculous,—“ not unless you like to come out and take the horsewhipping yourself. On the whole, I’d just as soon give it to you.”

“ Many thanks,” replied the doctor, with imperturbable coolness. “ But I could not consent to appropriate anything designed for Mr. Arling.”

"If it hurts your conscience, you can pass it over to him," rejoined Major Bergan, with grim humor.

"It would lose its flavor at second-hand," said the doctor, smiling.

"It would be your own fault, if it did," responded the Major. "At any rate, take care that my message don't lose anything, on the way. And while you're about it, just tell him that he shall never have Bergan Hall, nor an inch of ground that belongs to it, never! I'll give it to—Astra Lyte, first!"

The doctor slightly shrugged his shoulders, as an intimation that the Major's disposition of his property was a matter that did not interest him; but the latter mistook it for a sign of incredulity.

"I will! I swear I will!" he repeated, with an oath. "And why shouldn't I?" he went on, after a slight pause, as if the sudden idea had unexpectedly commended itself to him,—“why shouldn't I? Her father was my cousin; and he had Bergan blood in his veins, too, through his mother; and he was a right good fellow, besides. Where is she?"

"Miss Lyte is in New York, on a visit," replied the doctor.

"Umph! I should like to see her. Is she growing up bright and handsome?"

"She is both," returned the doctor, briefly.

"Then, she shall have it!" exclaimed the Major, with sudden decision. "I'll go home, and make my will. Tell Harry so, for his comfort, when he comes back."

And the Major, delighted that he had bethought himself of a revenge so swift and ample, mounted his horse, and rode off.

On Bergan's return, the scene was described to him by Doctor Remy, with a minuteness and accuracy of detail and coloring that did great credit to that gentleman's powers both of observation and description. Nevertheless, there was something of cynicism, or of satire, that grated

on his listener's ear; and he finally stopped the doctor's flow of eloquence with the question,—

“Who is Astra Lyte?”

The doctor looked at him, with much surprise. “Is it possible that you have not yet heard of her?” he asked. “She is Mrs. Lyte's eldest daughter; and a genius, too,—or, at least, an artist;—they are not always synonymous terms, I believe. But where have you been living, not to have become acquainted with her name before this? It is always on Mrs. Lyte's lips; at least, she is ready to talk of her by the hour, with a little encouragement.”

“My conversations with Mrs. Lyte have not been many nor long,” replied Bergan. “An artist, did you say?”

But Doctor Remy had fallen into a fit of thought. He merely answered the question by a nod; and very shortly, he left Bergan to his own reflections.

V.

UNDER THE OAKS.

NOT many weeks after the preceding incidents, Bergan went out, early one afternoon, for a long, solitary ramble. It was not his wont to leave his office before dusk, but his head ached with study, and his heart with loneliness and discouragement; an intolerable weariness and irksomeness had taken possession of him; his book seemed meaningless, and his brain paralyzed; there was nothing for it but to turn from the world of thought, that had suddenly grown so insufferably arid and dead, to the living, breathing world of nature. Forest, and field, and wave, if they could not give him intelligent sympathy, could at least furnish him gentle distraction.

And, oftentimes, there was a subtile harmony, almost amounting to sympathy, between his lonely moods, and the soft, rich, yet melancholy, Southern landscape,—for melancholy it always seemed to him, though that effect may have been partly owing to the gray medium of isolation and depression through which he viewed it. But, whatever its origin, this gentle mournfulness was the landscape's consummate charm,—at least, for any burdened human heart. It is possible that Eden wore a soft grace of pensive beauty, after the fall, which Adam and Eve, wandering back thither, would have counted a dearer delight, in their then mood, than its old, unshadowed brightness.

On his way out, Bergan found Nix stretched at full length across the threshold. With the usual preference of his race for masculine over feminine society, the dog had

early attached himself to the young man, as much as was consistent with a different ownership. He now rose, shook himself, wagged his tail, and looked wistfully in Bergan's face. Meeting with no rebuff, he made bold to follow him.

Leaving the town behind as quickly as possible, Bergan first struck into a long, lonely lane, shut in, on either side, by a thick border of multifarious foliage. Trees and shrubs, both deciduous and evergreen, not only mingled their boughs along its sides, but were tied together in an intricate polygamous knot by tangled vines. There was an endless diversity of form and color,—every shape of leaf, and every hue and shade of green and brown, with occasional tints of red, purple, and orange, both pale and bright,—and everywhere the gray fringe of the Spanish moss.

By and by, the lane terminated in the inevitable pine barren, which frames all Southern landscape pictures. It stretched away, in every direction, as far as the eye could reach,—a vast, dim solitude, with a thick, blue-green roof, upheld by innumerable slender columns, and a carpet of fallen needles, on which the foot fell without a sound. A mysterious sigh pervaded it, even when no breeze was astir; its light was but a gentle gloom; and it had a soft, aromatic atmosphere of its own, as if it were another world. No fitter place could have been found for the indulgence of a youthful day dream, with enough of inherent light and color to overcome the prevailing sombreness, or, at least, to set itself in stronger relief against so darksome a background. But to Bergan, the vast, dim monotony, with its suggestive correspondence to the circumstances of his own life, brought only added heartache. The chance openings into the sky were so few, and the sunshine never fell save flickeringly, at the farther extremity of some long vista! He soon began to yearn for outlook and aspiration, some spot affording at least a glimpse of the surrounding

world, as well as a fair look at the open sky. Happily, he knew where to find it.

Long since, he had discovered for himself a convenient and attractive out-door haunt,—a kind of natural amphitheatre, on the edge of one of the numerous bays, or creeks, of the vicinity. Great, patriarchal live-oaks, with hoary beards of moss trailing even to the ground, had ranged themselves in a semi-circle, on a high bank, overlooking the water. Standing in attitudes of ponderous grace, each one scattered shade and quietude over fifty, sixty, or, it might be, an hundred, feet of sward. Through a broad opening, in the midst of the dignified circle, the cheerful sunshine fell unbrokenly; and on the water-side, there was a fair stretch of blue waves, with a sea-green horizon-line afar; and over all, a wide half-dome of sky, with its changeable tracery of clouds, and its transparent concord of color. It was hard to believe that the hand of man had not wrought with that of nature, to produce a spot so perfect. Many a sunset had Bergan enjoyed there; many a twilight had he mused away, under the rustling oak-boughs; many a time, the rising moon had found him there, and surrounded him with weird enchantment.

All along, this spot had been the goal of his steps, though—by way of trying first what help and heart were to be found in exercise—he had chosen to reach it by a most circumlocutory route. So far as he knew, it was his own, by right of occupancy, as well as discovery; never had it showed a sign that it knew the pressure of any other human foot.

As he drew near, the sun was sending long, slanting beams of ruddy light athwart the amphitheatre, and dyeing the polished oak-leaves in rich tints of gold and orange. He quickened his steps, the sooner to reach the point whence sunset-splendors were to be seen to the best advantage; and upon which he had taken occasion to construct a low, rustic seat.

To his amazement, it was already occupied. A lady was quietly seated therein, her cheek resting on her hand, her eyes (as he judged from her *pose*, for her back was toward him) fixed on the glowing sky.

He stopped short, uncertain whether to advance or retreat.

Nix—who had lingered behind, to make a feint of hunting a squirrel—settled the question for him. Coming upon the scene, he first sniffed the air, and then dashed at the intruder. Fearing lest his intentions might be unfriendly, —or, at least, that the lady would be startled by his sudden appearance,—Bergan sternly called after him;—

“Nix! Nix! Here! Come back, you scamp!”

But Nix, if he heard, certainly did not heed. He was fawning upon the lady, in a way to indicate a previous acquaintance of considerable standing and intimacy. She, on her part, received his rude caresses quite as a matter of course, and cordially patted his rough head. Then she turned to Bergan.

“Nix does not mean to be disobedient,” said she, apologetically. “Only, he recognizes in me an older friend than Mr. Arling, and, perhaps,”—she smiled,—“a superseding authority.”

Bergan bowed. “He is fortunate,” said he,—“that is, in finding a friend, old or new, where he did not look for one.”

He spoke with a slight bitterness of tone, in involuntary recognition of the fact that no such pleasant discovery was ever the reward of his own aimless rambles. At the same time, he looked curiously at the lady, seeking a clue to her identity. She had seemed to know him; yet he could not remember that he had ever met her before.

Apparently, she was young; certainly, she was small, and somewhat slender. Without being absolutely pretty, her face was exceedingly interesting, by reason of its mobility and vivacity of expression;—albeit, its changes were

not always to be easily understood, nor its language at once interpreted. Her eyes were of the darkest gray, with a clear and penetrative glance, that seemed to go straight to the depths of whatever object they sought. Her manner, though perfectly feminine, had an air of strength and energy, in marked contrast with the languid grace which is the more frequent product of Southern soil. She was very simply dressed,—in some soft, gray material, the one beauty of which was its ability to fall in artistic folds about her figure;—nevertheless, there was a certain pleasant peculiarity, a kind of sober picturesqueness, about her attire, that lifted it more surely out of the region of the common-place than any richness of texture, or newness of fashion, could have done. Moreover, it satisfied the eye with a sense of fitness; it was plainly the legitimate outgrowth of the wearer's character. Not that it bid defiance to fashion, but it did not conform to it to the extent of a complete sacrifice of individuality.

Her only ornament was a cluster of bright scarlet leaves, that she had doubtless found on her way thither, and fastened on her breast; and which an opportune sun-ray now touched into vivid splendor. This, too, suited her. It seemed the subtle outward expression of some correspondingly warm and rich characteristic within; glowing soft against the gray texture of an otherwise grave, earnest, almost severe character. It might be sparkling wit, or warm affections, or both, that were thus pleasantly symbolized.

She met Bergan's curious glance with a quiet smile, that seemed to understand its object, and enjoy, beforehand, its discomfiture. She even answered it with a brief scrutiny, that was hardly less in earnest, though not at all puzzled,—scarcely, even, inquiring.

At this moment, the sun suddenly disappeared. The two faces, that had been so clearly and ruddily lit up by his declining beams, were left pale and shadowed, looking at

each other under the solemn old trees ; through the branches of which the wind now began to whisper softly, as if moved to utter some sombre prediction, which yet it could not make quite plain.

“Do you believe in omens?” asked the young lady, with a kind of playful shiver.

“Not at all,” answered Bergan, looking a little surprised.

“It is as well that you do not. For I suspect that they are like certain modes of medical treatment ; they require a large element of faith to make them efficacious. And, to say truth, neither do I believe in them—except in a poetical way. If I did, I should say that this sudden shadow augurs but badly for our future acquaintance, and influence upon each other.”

“If it means,” replied Bergan, “that we are to know sunshine and shade together, little more could be predicted—or desired—of any earthly acquaintance.”

“Perhaps not. Still, as I *do* believe in omens, as I said before, in a poetical way, I am glad to see that the sun is not really set, after all. He only sank into a deceptive line of cloud. There ! he comes forth again, to give us another bright glance before his final leave-taking. And, in order to leave the omen in its present satisfactory state, I will anticipate his departure. Good evening.”

Slightly inclining her head, as she passed Bergan, she quickly disappeared under the low-hanging oak boughs.

Nix looked after her, for a moment ; then he turned to Bergan, as if wondering why he did not go, too. Seeing no sign of departure, he was about to fling himself upon the ground, when a clear, sweet whistle suddenly sounded from the direction which the young lady had taken. Pricking up his ears, he instantly set off at a great pace ; leaving Bergan with a vague sadness, as having been deserted by his last friend.

However, the feeling was but momentary. Very quickly

he turned to the consideration of the interesting question who his late interlocutor might be. Running over in his mind all the branches of the family of Bergan, in the neighborhood (of which there were several, more or less direct), he soon decided that she did not harmonize with what he knew of any of them. Yet she had seemed to know *him*; and to think, and even to intimate, that they were likely to meet again, and possibly to exert a degree of influence upon each other's lives. And still, as he pondered and questioned, the oak trees kept whispering overhead, with all their multitudinous tongues, an apparently full, but unintelligible, explanation.

He bewildered himself with conjectures, until all the sunset tints had faded from the sky, and darkness was fast gathering under the oak boughs. Then he rose, and went his solitary way homeward.

Arrived at Mrs. Lyte's gate, it seemed to him that there was an unusual stir and liveliness about the house. Certainly, a broad beam of light was shining across the hall, from a door that he had never before seen open. Ere he could think what these things betokened, Cathie came running to meet him, with a great piece of news in her beaming face.

"Oh! Mr. Arling!" she exclaimed, in almost breathless delight, "Astra has come!"

The mystery was at an end. Indeed it could scarcely have been a mystery, but for two concurrent circumstances. In the first place, knowing Miss Lyte to be an artist,—or at least, an art-student,—and possessed of a sufficiently independent character and spirit, he had unconsciously sketched a portrait of her in his fancy, very different from the original,—taller, larger, with more color, and, certainly, less feminine. And, secondly, only the day before, he had heard Mrs. Lyte lamenting that her daughter would not be at home for another month.

A sudden turn of circumstances, however, had wrought

an equally sudden change in Miss Lyte's plans ; and, taking advantage of the opportune escort afforded by a business trip of a friend, she had journeyed southward with such celerity as to outstrip the letter of announcement that she had dispatched, a day before her departure from New York. Reaching home almost immediately after Bergan had gone out for his solitary stroll, she had spent the afternoon in a long, earnest, circumstantial talk with her mother,—discussing her plans and prospects,—throwing off, with careless fluency, vivid picture upon picture of her art life and work in the city,—listening eagerly to interjectional items of home news,—and cheering Mrs. Lyte's heart, through and through, with her bright spirits, her ready, yet healthful, sympathy, and the inspiring energy both of her manner and mind. With the very sight of her, more than half the widow's burden of sorrow and care had slipped unconsciously from her shoulders.

Finally, toward sunset, foreseeing an unusual amount of sky-splendor, she had gone forth for a brief enjoyment of it to her old, favorite haunt,—the oak glade which Bergan had also discovered and taken into favor. Meeting the young man there, she had instantly recognized him,—by reason of Nix's suggestive companionship, and her mother's recent description,—and had taken an innocent pleasure in subjecting him to a transient mystification.

"She gave us *such* a surprise," went on Cathie, joyously. "Mamma almost fainted, and I—guess what I did, Mr. Arling."

To please her, Bergan guessed what he supposed to be the most unlikely thing ; and so, in consequence of the child's peculiar character, he guessed right.

"Doubtless, you cried," said he.

"So I did," replied Cathie, opening her eyes wide, "though I can't see how you knew it. But I thought I was laughing, all the time, till Astra asked me why I was so sorry to see her, and offered to go away again 'if the sight

of her was so painful !' And *that* made me laugh, in good earnest ! And oh ! Mr. Arling, do come and see her little white boy ! She has just been unpacking him, to show him to mamma."

"Willingly," replied Bergan, "if you are sure that she would like me to see him."

"I'll ask her," replied Cathie, darting through the open doorway at the left, whence came the broad beam of light aforementioned, and through which Bergan caught a glimpse of Mrs. Lyte's black-draped figure, seated at the farther corner of the room, in an attitude of pleased contemplation of some object not within his range of vision.

The next moment, Miss Lyte herself appeared on the threshold, and, seeing by his face that his mystification was over, she frankly held out her hand to him.

"So you have found me out !" said she, laughing. "Was it wicked in me not to answer that look in your eyes, which said so plainly, 'Who on earth *can* she be ?' Can you pardon my selfish enjoyment of your perplexity ?"

"A perplexity that ends so pleasantly deserves thanks rather than pardon," returned Bergan.

And having answered Mrs. Lyte's cordial greeting, and congratulated her upon the event which had brought such unaccustomed radiance into her face, Bergan turned, with a pardonable curiosity—or it might more fitly be termed, an inevitable interest,—to glance around the room in which he found himself. Never before had he happened to enter that middle ground between the airiest ideal and the earthliest real, which is occupied by a sculptor's studio.

VI.

OF CLAY.

BERGAN'S first glance around the studio was necessarily a comprehensive one, dealing with general effect, rather than minute detail. A large (though not a lofty) room; a bare floor; walls crowded with designs and studies; four or five busts and statues standing around the sides, and the life-size figure of a child in the middle, of the room;—this was what that first glance revealed to him.

Cathie gave him no time for a second. "Look at the dear little boy, Mr. Arling; do look at him!" she exclaimed, joining her hands over her head, and executing a rapturous *pas seul* around the object of her delight. "See his cunning little whip, and his funny little feet, and isn't he a little white darling!"

Thus besought, Bergan turned his attention to the statue in the midst.

At first sight, it seemed to represent merely a pretty and playful human child, with a toy-whip in his hand, his head half-turned over one shoulder, and an arch and roguish expression, as if bent on some errand of mischief. But, while Bergan continued to gaze, fascinated, the small physiognomy seemed to grow wily and malign, as well as arch; and an intelligence, far more swift and subtle than ever infant of mortal race was gifted withal, informed the tiny features. The light feet, too, were plainly moved by deliberate purpose of guile, rather than childish impulse; and on their soles, broad sinuate leaves were bound, either for protection or disguise.

Bergan looked at the figure long and earnestly, enjoying its delicate freshness and piquancy, but trying in vain to fathom its meaning.

"What will-o'-the-wisp is it?" he finally asked. "And what is he doing, with his soft cunning and smiling malice?"

"He is a god," replied Astra. "As to his errand, it is the laudable one of cattle-stealing."

"It seems to be a case of very early depravity," said Bergan, smiling, yet puzzled.

"Early enough to be termed 'original sin,'" returned Astra. "For

'The babe was born at the first peep of day * *
And the *same evening* did he steal away
Apollo's herds.'—

Did you ever read Homer's 'Hymn to Mercury?'"

"Never. Indeed, I am not quite sure that I ever heard of it," replied Bergan. "Is it usually counted among his works?"

"I think so; though it is fair to say that his authorship of it has been questioned. At any rate, Shelley has put it into very musical English verse; and there I found my subject. The circumstances of Mercury's birth being first narrated, the newborn immortal is described as 'a babe all other babes excelling,' and also a subtle schemer and thief. He first invents the lyre, and accompanies his own impromptu song of 'plastic verse,' with it; then he is 'seized with a sudden fancy for fresh meat,' and betakes himself to the Pierian mountains, where Apollo's 'immortal oxen' are feeding. Separating fifty from the herd,

'He drove them wandering o'er the sandy way,
But, being ever mindful of his craft,—'

that is to say, his inborn guile,—

'Backward and forward drove he them astray,
So that the tracks, which seemed before, were aft:
His sandals then he threw to the ocean-spray,
And for each foot he wrought a kind of raft
Of tamarisk and tamarisk-like twigs,'—

"I see," said Bergan, smiling. "The consummate little rogue!"

Astra went on:—

"And on his feet he bound these sandals light,
The trail of whose wide leaves might not betray
His track; and then, a self-sufficing wight, * *
He from Pieria's mountain bent his flight,—"

driving the stolen cattle before him, of course. And this is the moment at which I have sought to represent him."

"And very perfectly you have succeeded," said Bergan, admiringly. "The arch cunning and malice of the face is simply wonderful. Indeed, it seems to me that the statue lacks but one thing."

"And what is that?" said Astra, quickly; at the same time flashing a swift, searching glance at her work, as if she would fain have anticipated the criticism.

"It does not tell how the story ended."

"Oh!" said Astra, looking both relieved and amused. "I am glad that you did not keep me waiting so long as Michael Angelo did poor Domenico."

"How long was that, pray?"

"You shall hear. Domenico Ghirlandaio, a celebrated Florentine painter, having completed a picture of St. Francis, upon which he had exhausted his utmost skill, and which seemed to him to be perfect, sent for a young artist of great promise, Buonarotti by name, (who had also been his pupil), and asked for his opinion of the work. The young man contemplated it for some moments, said gravely, 'It needs but one thing,' and departed. The master remained, to study the picture anew, to pore over it hour after hour, and day after day, and rack his brain with the question what it needed. Years after, when Buonarotti had become Michael Angelo, and filled the world with his fame, Domenico sent for him to come to his death-chamber. 'What did the picture need?' he asked, faintly. 'Only

speech,' replied Michael Angelo. The old master smiled,—and died."

"It is a touching story," said Bergan. "And it is almost an allegory, too. For 'only speech' is so often the great need of life! All our deepest feeling and best thought are inarticulate. But am I to be indulged with the rest of *this* story, also?" he added, turning again to the statue.

"I will give it you in brief," replied Astra, "by way of whetting your appetite for the richer savors of the poem itself. Having driven his stolen cattle to Alpheus, the infant god selected two fat heifers for sacrifice. And here, it seems to me, is one of the finest touches in the whole poem. After kindling his fire, slaying his heifers, and offering a portion to each of the twelve gods,

—'his mind became aware
Of all the joys that in religion are.
For the sweet savor of the roasted meat
Tempted him, though immortal. Nathless
He checked his haughty will and did not eat,
Though what it cost him words can scarce express.'

Here, you see, is real self-denial and self-conquest,—for the sake of making an acceptable sacrifice,—and their deep after delight."

"If the offering had been less ill-gotten," remarked Bergan, somewhat dryly, "I think the 'touch' would have been still finer."

"I confess that I had forgotten all about that," said Astra, laughing, "in my admiration of the infant god's mastery over himself. Still, we cannot expect to find the purity of the Gospel standard of life in the heathen mythology; we can but be thankful for the gleams of Divine light here and there irradiating it, since a whole people long lived and died under its sanction. But, at this rate, my story will never end! The baby god next proceeded

to remove every trace of his holocaust, working all night 'in the serene moonshine.' Then, at break of day, he betook himself to his natal cavern, crept quickly to his cradle, pulled his 'ambrosial swaddling clothes about him,' and put on a soft semblance of new-born innocence. In due time, Apollo, having discovered the loss of his cattle, and suspecting who was the rogue, came to the cavern, found the 'subtle, swindling baby,' lying 'swathed in his sly wiles,' and taxed him with the theft. At once, the young 'god of lies' shows forth his character. He stoutly denies all knowledge of the mischief; he pathetically declares,—

‘I am but a little newborn thing,
Who yet, at least, can think of nothing wrong;
My business is to suck and sleep and fling
The cradle-clothes about me all day long,—
Or, half-asleep, hear my sweet mother sing,—
And to be washed in water clean and warm,
And hushed and kissed and kept secure from harm :—’

and, finally, he swears that he does not even know 'whatever things cows are!' However, Apollo turns a deaf ear to all his wiles and pleadings, and compels him to go before Jupiter; who laughs to hear his plausible account of himself,—'and every word a lie,'—but finally bids him show Apollo where he has hidden the stolen cattle. This he does, 'nothing loath,' and finally subdues the sun-god

—‘by the might,
Of winning music, to his mightier will:
. sweet as love,
The penetrating notes did live and move
Within the heart of great Apollo: he
Listened with all his soul, and laughed for pleasure.’

“And here we may as well leave them. For the rest of the story,—as well as for many pleasant pictures and nice touches, of which my abstract gives no hint,—you should go to the poem itself.”

"I shall be sure to do so," said Bergan, "with this arch, airy little figure to lead the way. But it should be in marble, it seems to me, rather than in plaster."

Astra smiled gravely. "For that, a patron—or, at least, a purchaser—is needed. Marble is expensive as well as indestructible; few artists can afford to put their works into its safe keeping, without help. And perhaps it is as well that such is the case, else Posterity would never be able to bear the stony accumulation that would be heaped on its back."

"I think I can venture to promise that it would never feel this airy creation to be a burden," said Bergan, earnestly.

"I hope not. But my little Mercury is still my youngest darling, and I feel all a mother's partiality for it; I have no eyes for its faults. When the inevitable time of disenchantment comes, and I am able to see it as it is, I can better tell whether I care to commit it to the white immortality of marble."

She continued to gaze at the statue for some moments with fond, dreamy, wistful eyes,—just as a mother might regard her newborn infant. Bergan felt a slight pang in beholding this nearness of the work to its author, this strong, tender, indissoluble bond between the two. Would ever any work of his—any brief, or plea—come from such a warm depth of his heart, and embody so much of his life? A poet, a musician even, might know something of this deep gladness of creation; but a lawyer, a judge, dealing with dry reason and dusty legal enactments,—was there any such joy in his work for him?

Leaving the question unanswered,—as he must needs do, until time and experience should come to his help,—Bergan turned anew to the contemplation of the Mercury; which seemed to grow in beauty and power, as he continued to look. It would be hard to say how much of this pleasurable effect was due to the inherent charm of the

work, and how much to the spell shed from the rapt face and softly illuminated eyes of the artist. Many a work that we look upon but coldly, would quickly find its way to our hearts, if we knew enough of its history and its author, to give us the clue to its subtler spirit and aim; while those which we love without such knowledge, would, by its help, be transfigured—glorified. If we could stand with Michael Angelo before his “Moses,” or with Guido before his triumphant “Archangel,” what new lights of interpretation would be lit for us at the eyes and lips of those great masters!

Nor must it be said that the spectator may be dazzled by the artist's enthusiasm into awarding the work higher praise than a cooler judgment would sanction. For just here lies the truth which is too often overlooked in criticism, both of literature and art. If the critic be not in sympathy with the worker,—if he do not, in some measure, behold the work through his eyes,—if he cannot discern what was attempted as well as what is attained,—then his eyes will be partially holden both from the beauties and the faults of the work. For nothing, in life or art, was meant to be looked at by itself. Everything is related to something else; each helps all. The moment wherein the spectator's mood and the artist's work make sweet harmony, is the moment of correct appreciation.

If Bergan did not understand what an illumination the presence of Miss Lyte threw over her work, he was fully conscious that her work shed a transfiguring light over her. The face under the whispering oak boughs was not the same as this in the studio. That had been simply bright and mobile, with a spice of *espiéglerie*; this was all alight and astir with genius. Miss Lyte's very hand partook of the transformation. Bergan had happened to notice its symmetrical shape, as revealed by a careless gesture, at their first meeting; but he now decided that it was not so much its beauty which had attracted his atten-

tion, as a certain peculiarity of delicate energy and adroitness, which ought of itself to have suggested its artistic skill.

Bergan's eye fell next on the pedestal of the Mercury, improvised by turning up on end the packing-box in which it had arrived. The lid lay on the floor, in two pieces, and was surmounted by a sturdy-looking hammer and chisel. Bergan's glance went back to that slender hand, with an unconscious question in it; which Astra was quick to understand.

"Why not?" said she, with a smile. "Of course, I might have called in old Cato to open the box; but he would have done it so slowly and awkwardly that I should have suffered tortures in watching him; it was easier to do it myself. To be sure," she went on, taking up the hammer and chisel, "these are not quite so fit for a lady's hands as the lighter and slenderer implements that I use in modelling; but I like them well, nevertheless. It would go hard with me, here in this quiet country town, away from all aids and appliances of art, if I were not on very good terms with purely mechanical labor. I made the mould, from which that cast was taken, myself;"—she pointed to the Mercury.

Bergan looked as if he scarcely understood.

"I suppose you are aware," pursued Astra, "that the word 'sculptor' is a misnomer, nowadays. The real sculpture—that is the marble-cutting—except a few finishing touches, is done by artisans skilled in that work. The plaster casts are made by regular casters, from moulds taken from clay models. These last, only, are the work of the artist throughout,—shaped by his fingers, and informed by his thought. See! here is the raw material of my work!"

She pointed to a large triangular box, in one corner of her closet, filled with fine, moist clay. She even leaned over it, and inhaled its earthy odor, with a kind of affection.

Bergan also looked into it so long, so silently, and with so meditative an aspect, that Miss Lyte finally interrupted the flow of his thoughts with a question as to their character.

"I was thinking," replied he, "of the many differing shapes,—lovely, grand, sorrowful, joyous, winning, repulsive,—that might be lurking within your tub. And I was wondering which of them you would next call forth."

"Think, rather," said Astra, smiling, "of all the shapes that I have sent into it."

"You do not mean to say that you use the same clay over again," exclaimed Bergan, in surprise.

"Certainly, I do. It loses none of its adaptability by use. In that tub is the original clay of everything that you see in my studio,—all the busts, statues, and reliefs, that I have ever done, or tried to do,—all my successes, and all my failures;—every one of them has gone into that tub, even as it came out of it."

"Creation and death!" exclaimed Bergan. "'Dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.' It is a world in miniature!"

"And does it not also show that there is nothing new under the sun?" said Astra. "It is always the old material in new shapes, the old thought in new phraseology, the old human nature in new conditions, even the old particles of disintegrated human bodies in new organisms."

"And yet," remarked Bergan, musingly, "the spirit, the idea, that informed those bodies, and gave them identity, is not lost, as your Mercury shows plainly. The being that you have created lives, and glows with all his proper warmth and fire, even though his original substance has not only returned whence it came, but has helped to frame an entirely different being."

"The natural body and the spiritual body," returned Astra. "Not that the two processes are really analogous,—I do not mean that,—but one naturally suggests the

other to the mind. And, seeing how I am thus able to accomplish a kind of resurrection, in a way that I understand, I do not find it difficult to believe that the Almighty can do it, in a way that I do not understand, and far more perfectly,—retaining not only the indwelling spirit, but enough of the individual clay to justify Job's saying, 'In my flesh I shall see God.'"

The thought kept them both silent, for a moment ; then Bergan turned to see what else of interest was to be found in the studio.

The completed works were not many ; Miss Lyte was still too young to have made a large accumulation of such things. There was a bust, with a very sweet and noble expression, wherein she had embodied her recollections of a fellow student in art. There was a half-sleepy, half-ashamed boy-face, looking out from under the shadow of a drooping hat, representing "Little Boy Blue," of nursery fame. There was a winged cherub, with an exceedingly lovely, innocent face,—a very incarnation of celestial joy and peace. In relief, there was a stout urchin, ankle-deep in water, laden with pond-lilies, and looking for more. Finally, there were innumerable studies, sketches, and designs, with all the warmth and freshness of the original inspiration lingering about them ; which interested Bergan scarcely less than the finished work, as admitting him still more freely into the *arcana* of the artist's mind and method.

He was especially interested to observe in how many directions the genius of Miss Lyte had tried its wing. There were studies, and even finished pictures, in oil and in crayon ; there was an exquisitely-cut cameo, fastened on a background of velvet ; there were designs for stained-glass windows ; and in all, there was a curious medley of subjects,—scriptural, mythological, historical, domestic, and still-life. It was plain that she had been slowly feeling her way to some point, where she could take her final stand, and see her life-work lying clear and fair before her. Had she found

it ? Looking at the Mercury, Bergan could almost believe that she had ; but, glancing again at her deep, wistful eyes, he doubted it. A little more time, a profounder and wider experience, would settle her genius, fix her aims, and make her capable of things far higher than aught that she had yet achieved.

Meanwhile, never, he thought, was anything quite so inspiring as her conversation. As she went with him from statue to statue, and sketch to sketch, talking frankly of her difficulties and struggles, her failures and successes, her aims and aspirations,—now dropping a fertile suggestion, now pointing out a subtle analogy, now giving the key-note to some elevating strain of thought,—she seemed to radiate energy, and exhale inspiration. Listening to her, Bergan's depression and discouragement vanished like mists before the sunshine. When he went back to his studio, it was with new strength and courage and ambition. Somehow, life had ceased to look unsympathizing, and success remote.

VII.

HIDDEN RICHES.

UP to this time, the history of Astra Lyte may be compressed into a few sentences. She was the daughter of Dr. Harvey Lyte, who had been, for many years, the leading physician of Berganton. Her artistic talent having early manifested itself, her father had taken pleasure in fostering and developing it ; first, by giving her the benefit of whatever rudimentary instruction the neighborhood offered, and then, by affording her a year's enjoyment of the best art advantages to be procured in New York.

Little more than a year ago, however, the good doctor had been forced to succumb, in his own person, to the two powerful foes that he had spent his lifetime in battling for others,—namely, disease and death. His professional income necessarily dying with him, only a moderate provision remained for his family ; enough to enable them to eat the bread of carefulness, but not sufficient to maintain them in the degree of easy comfort and luxury to which they had long been accustomed. In due time changes and sacrifices became necessary ; among which may be mentioned the letting of the vacant medical office to Doctor Remy, and the subsequent handing over of other dispensable rooms to the occupancy of Bergan Arling.

Before this last arrangement was effected, however, Astra had gone to New York, to see what could be done to make her art productive of something besides pleasure. That had been a very bright moment, amid the gloom and straitness following upon her father's death, wherein it had occurred to her that she possessed in brain and fingers, in

her wonderful power of kneading together thought and matter into beautiful and significant shapes, the means of restoring to her mother the ease and independence which had been impaired by her father's death. Never had her art looked so divine as when it cast aside the soft drapery of personal gratifications and aims, and stood forth a young athlete, eager for strife, a sturdy son of toil, ready to earn its bread by the sweat of its brow.

Not that Astra expected to win success all at once, or quickly. There was a vast deal of practicality underlying her imaginativeness and enthusiasm,—the solid foundation which is needed to make genius available. She foresaw (no one more clearly) the difficulties, delays, and disappointments, before her. But what of that? She was young; she was in good health; she had a courageous heart, an energetic temperament, and buoyant spirits; she could afford to work and wait. Her tastes were simple, her wants, outside the domain of art, few,—and, even there, deficiencies could be supplied, in a measure, by severe study and closer application. If the superior masters, the sojourn in Europe, to which she had looked forward, were denied her, she was not going to break her heart nor cloud her brow, about it. God, who had given her talent, would not leave it without due means of increase. Her duty was to work, to be brave, and to be cheerful; all else would come, in good time.

This, then, was the sort of a person who had now come to dwell under the same roof with Bergan; and who straightway set to work in her studio, which was divided from his office only by the airy breadth of the main hall. Of course, he saw her frequently; her art afforded them broader, freer ground upon which to meet than is always open to man and woman. Not that the proprieties need have been scandalized had Miss Lyte's occupation been the embroidering of roses in worsted, instead of the modelling of figures in clay; for the door between studio and sitting-room stood always

open, and Mrs. Lyte, from her work-table, frequently threw a passing remark into the conversation that came so freely to her ears ; while Cathie continually flashed in and out like a fire-fly or a humming bird. But the worsted roses would scarcely have constituted a subject of mutual interest for the young man and woman, as did the clay figures ; nor would the talks over them have run so naturally, and almost inevitably, upon the same elevated and impersonal plane of thought. Setting the worker entirely aside, Bergan could not fail to be deeply interested in the work. He liked to understand its process, and watch its progress. It was wonderful to him to see the dull clay slowly taking the shape of the viewless, informing thought. He went back to his office, not only with a deeper comprehension of the respective functions of mind and matter, but with a wider view of their scope and influence. Words, he saw, were also a kind of plastic material, through which thought revealed itself to eye and ear. He began to study expression, as well as meaning ; he selected words, and constructed sentences, with greater care and conscientiousness ; he saw that, since thought could only become visible through form, form was a matter of more moment, and involved a stricter duty, than he had hitherto believed.

But if Bergan learned so much from the work, it must be acknowledged that he also learned something from the worker. She was so loyal to her art and her aims. She wrought with such cheerful diligence, such unwasting enthusiasm, and such thorough conscientiousness. Having done the best of which she was capable, she maintained such a steady front against the assaults of depression and discouragement, deploying their forces upon the wide space between her conception and her achievement. If she failed, she cheerfully declared that the failure had taught her more than any success could have done, and commenced anew ; if she succeeded, she was soberly glad, as having gained an inch or two of the field,—over which, however,

it might be long ere she could wave the banner of victory. The spectacle could not fail to have a healthful influence upon Bergan, inasmuch as Miss Lyte's patrons were not more numerous than his clients; he saw that she kept her face bright, and her spirit brave, under very real trials of limitation, delay, and disappointment. He always went to his own work with a stouter heart and steadier purpose, after watching hers for some moments; whether she merely retouched and revised the preceding day's labor, with minute, inexhaustible patience; or quietly gathered up the fragments of a model overtaken by sudden disaster; or moulded moist clay, with rapt face, eyes lit by a deep, inward fire, and fingers so swift and forceful as to suggest the guidance of some unseen power. In this last case, he did not disturb her by so much as a word. He only looked on in silence until her white heat of inspiration had kindled something like a kindred glow in his own mind; when he noiselessly stole out, to plunge into his own work with renewed ardor. We may well believe that, just at the moment when Bergan's lonely life and dim prospects were beginning to tell upon his spirits and energies, it was not without providential design that an object so inspiring and heartening as Astra Lyte in her studio, was placed before his eyes.

Nor was the benefit wholly on one side. Astra found real help and cheer in Bergan's intelligent interest and hearty appreciation. Moreover, he was quick to see whenever mechanical contrivance or manly strength could come to her aid; and he knew how to furnish both, in fit and delicate measure. His perceptions were scarcely less nice than her own; he knew just when to extend the helping hand, and when to withdraw it; neither hesitation nor officiousness marred his aid.

But Bergan was not the only visitor at the studio. Doctor Remy's straight-featured, intellectual face was often to be seen there, with its chill and satirical expression half-

obliterated by a look of kindly interest. And his aid was not less ready than Bergan's, and, perhaps, more valuable. Hints and criticisms, suggested by his profound anatomical and physiological knowledge, often came just in time to prevent a blunder, or clinch a success.

So time rolled on, for another month or two, doing much for the growth of acquaintance, and even a degree of intimacy, between the artist, the lawyer, and the physician, thus thrown together under one roof, but very little for the pecuniary advantage of the two former. Astra had received a commission for a small portrait-medallion; Bergan had been employed to draw up a few law-papers. The two often exchanged good-humored jests upon the manifest ability of the world to get on without their help. But it was a much more serious matter for the young man than the maiden. Astra had understood that, Art being a luxury, it must first create the demand which it meant to supply; but Bergan knew well that law was neither unknown nor unsought, in Berganton. Courts were held, and lawyers gathered, there; it was strange that so little of the work came to his hands. Meanwhile, the funds with which he had been supplied, on leaving home, were rapidly melting away; and he was unwilling to apply for more, both because he desired to be self-dependent, and disliked to admit failure.

He was sitting in his office, one afternoon, dividing his thoughts between his books and the unpromising state of his affairs, when there came a cautious knock at the door.

"Come in!" he called out, wondering if his long-expected client were about to present himself.

First, appeared a black hand and a nondescript hat; next, a woolly head and a wide, delighted grin; finally, a loose, slouching form, in a shapeless suit of plantation gray. No client was this. It was only his would-be property, Brick.

Perhaps Bergan's disappointment showed itself in his

countenance, for the negro hastily began to explain the reason of his coming.

"Gramma Rue, *she* sent me, massa. She don't feel right smart, dese yere times, an' she say she tink her days drawin' to her close, an' she's mighty anxious to see you, massa, 'fore she done gone. So she tole me to ax you, could n' you come to yer ole room in de Hall, some ob dese yere ebenins, jes' so's to gib her a chance to talk wid you. Ole massa need n' know nothin' 'bout it; he's allers safe 'nough in de cottage dem times. An' she hopes you'll hab de kin'ness to come, 'case she's got suthin' bery partic'lar to say to you."

Bergan hesitated. He could not visit the old Hall without reviving painful recollections; besides, it did not suit his natural straightforwardness to go thither in a half-clandestine way. Yet how could he refuse the urgent request of Maumer Rue, weighted not only with the probability of coming death, but with the consideration of her long, faithful, life service of his mother's family? And, after all, there was no great harm in a visit to the deserted Hall, to gratify an old, infirm, attached dependent. He certainly need do no skulking; if he chanced to come upon his uncle, he could fairly and frankly face both him and the situation.

Accordingly, he directed his evening stroll toward Bergan Hall. It was an obscure night of late March. A gray veil of cloud covered the wide expanse of sky, from horizon to zenith; through which only the faintest light struggled, to guide his steps up the ruined avenue. He could not but be reminded of his first forlorn coming upon the desolate scene; even though he was obliged to confess that, in some respects, matters were mending. Though the Hall stood silent and ruinous as before, under the sighing oaks, it was not wholly dark. An arch of light shone above the doorway, and a second gleam came invitingly from the window of the room that he had once called his

own. The door, too, yielded readily to his pressure. At this rate of improvement, a few years might easily transform the shadow-haunted old ruin into a cheery, heartwarm home.

It was only a passing thought, and did not slacken in the least the light, quick step with which he ran up to his old room. Rue had done her best to give it a look of home and welcome. A fire blazed on the hearth, and reddened the walls; his favorite arm-chair was drawn before it; near by, stood a round table, with two tall candles, a few scattered books, and a tray of refreshments. It all looked strangely familiar:—there was the secretary at which he had written his letters home; there was the book that he had been reading, with his mark between the leaves; there was the flute, so few of whose long-prisoned harmonies he had been able to set free. Was it really five months since he saw them last?

Rue was not in the room when he entered it; it did not suit her notion of their respective positions to assume any quality of hostess. But she almost immediately appeared, and greeted him with tearful affection and respect. Bergan looked at her narrowly, and was pained to see that her tall form had lost much of its old erect stateliness, and that she leaned heavily on her cane as she walked. Still, there was no sign of immediate loosing of the silver life-cord; on the whole, he thought that she bore her heavy burden of years wonderfully well, and the thought came naturally to his lips.

“It may seem so,” replied the old woman, with a slow shake of her head, “but I feel a greater change than you can see, Master Bergan. Till now, I never knew anything about the chill or the heaviness of age; it has come upon me all at once. I do not think, any more than you do, that the end itself is close at hand; but the beginning of the end is certainly here. Let it come as soon as the Lord wills; He knows I’m ready. Only it is borne in upon me that

there's something more for me to do for the family, before I leave their service; though I cannot rightly see what. Sometimes I am almost sure that it's just to see that you are put into your rightful place as the master of Bergan Hall. If that is all that I am waiting for, I wish it might be done quickly. Couldn't you make up your mind to come back here now, if Master Harry would ask you kindly? I know I can get him to do it."

"Indeed, I could not, maumer," answered Bergan, quietly, but very firmly. "I am not yet in a position to treat with my uncle, on equal terms. And I am less than ever inclined to be dependent upon him, or any one. Let me beg you to give yourself no further care or thought in the matter."

Rue sighed deeply. There was something in the young man's tone that forestalled either argument or entreaty.

"Pardon an old woman's curiosity," she said, at length, "but, are you very much nearer to independence than when you left here?"

"I cannot say that I am."

"Do you have much to do, in the way of your profession?"

"I could easily do more." There was a slight dryness in Bergan's intonation, that did not escape the blind woman's quick ear.

"Come with me, please; I have something to show you," said she, turning toward the door. "You had better bring a light, too; you will need it, though I do not."

She led the way to a large room on the other side of the hall,—the bed-chamber (and death-chamber, too) of the mansion's departed owners. It was lined, from floor to ceiling, with carved and panelled wainscoting. Rue went straightway to one side, not far from the mantel, ran her fingers carefully over the dark, uneven surface, and finally pressed hard on a projecting point.

"Now, Master Bergan," said she, pointing to a great, carved acorn, "take hold of that, and push this way."

Bergan obeyed, and a considerable portion of the wainscoting slid easily to one side, disclosing a small room or closet, so artfully contrived between wall and chimney, that its existence could never have been suspected. It was lighted and ventilated by a window, and furnished with an armchair and a massive, old-fashioned secretary. Rue opened one of the compartments of the latter, and revealed several small canvas bags, which, it was easy to see, contained gold and silver coin.

Bergan was naturally a good deal surprised at sight of the hidden hoard. It seemed scarcely credible that any man in his senses should care to lay up such idle store of the precious metals, which might otherwise be profitably employed in an easy process of self-augmentation. Still, he knew enough of his uncle's surly and suspicious character, and of his distrust of banks (which he had once heard him characterize as "ready sinks for fools' money"), to leave only room for a passing wonder.

"I have brought you here, Master Bergan," said Rue, solemnly, "because this secret rightly belongs to you, as the future master of the Hall. It is the duty of each owner to make it known to his heir, on his deathbed, or earlier. The place was contrived by Sir Harry, because there was something like it in the English Bergan Hall, which served for a hiding place for men and women in troublous times; and he provided for the keeping and handing down of the secret, in the same way as it had been done there. It was only to be known to the owner and the heir."

"Then how came you to know it?" asked Bergan.

"I will tell you. When the third Harry Bergan was at the point of death, his heir was in Europe. The person whom he most trusted, in the world, was his body-servant, Cato. He gave the secret to him, to be kept till the heir's return. Cato was my great-great-great grandfather. He

thought the same thing might happen again, and the secret be lost ; so, on his deathbed, he told it to his son, and the son told it to his son, and so on, till my father, who had no son, told it to me. So, you see, the secret has run down in the black blood alongside of the white blood, and been kept just as sacredly. But the white blood has never known it till now ; when I tell it to you, because I have no child living, and Brick is still too young to be trusted with such a matter."

"What a strange circumstance!" said Bergan, deeply interested. "Has the place ever been used except as a storeroom for valuables?"

"Only once, to my knowledge. During the Revolution, Colonel Bergan was hidden here some days, when a party of British were quartered on the premises,—some of the same party that Sergeant Jasper afterwards captured."

She paused for a moment, while Bergan silently looked round the narrow walls ; and then she resumed.

"You see what use Master Harry makes of the place. And perhaps you know him well enough to understand that he will never tell any one where he keeps his money, until his breath is almost out of his body. That is why I brought you here. I cannot expect to outlive him ; and if he should die suddenly, or with the secret only half-way off his tongue, it would die with him."

"Perhaps you have done well," said Bergan, after a moment of thought. "Certainly, I shall regard it only as a trust for the future owner of the Hall, whoever he may be."

"He will be none other than yourself," returned Rue, decidedly. "I only wish I were as certain of the time, as I am of the fact. And now," she continued, pointing to the bags of coin, "take as much of that as you need. Master Harry will never miss it ; I don't think he ever counts it over, he is so sure that it is safe here. And it will all be your own some day."

"What do you mean!" exclaimed Bergan, angrily, starting back. "Do you take me for a thief?"

"Of course not, Master Bergan, of course not," answered Rue, earnestly and deprecatingly, laying her hand on his arm. "It is only because I *know* that it will be yours in time; and as Master Harry does not need it nor use it, why shouldn't you have the good of it now, when you need it more than you ever may again? If it suits you better, take it as a loan, and pay it back, when you are able."

"No! no!" said Bergan, turning hurriedly away, "it is impossible. You mean kindly, I know, Maumer Rue, but you do not seem to understand the facts. I have no more right to it than any stranger; I could not touch it, to save me from starving. Come, let us go! I have seen enough."

"I believe you are right," said Rue, after a pause, "and I am a foolish old woman. I could not bear to think that my dear Miss Eleanor's son was pinching himself, in the least, when there was so much idle gold in the old house; but I see you are right, sir; and I beg your pardon."

It was not without a sense of relief that Bergan soon after closed the door of the old Hall behind him, and stepped out into the cool, fresh night air. Not that he had suffered any real trial of temptation,—his principles were too true and firm for that;—but there had been something in the whole sombre scene—the deserted, death-scented chamber, the concealed closet, the hoarded gold—that had left him with a sense of oppression, which kept its hold of him all the way home.

It was late when he reached his office. To his surprise, it was not empty. A gentleman was sitting by the table, with a pile of papers before him, and a weary, discontented face, as if his waiting had outlasted his patience.

Bergan's heart gave a great leap. He divined that his long-looked-for client was before him!

VIII.

THE WIND CHANGES.

“GOOD evening, Squire,” said the stranger, in a deep voice,—a voice that would have been gruff, but for the melodizing influences of the soft southern climate. “My name is Corlew—John Corlew, of Williston. I came to see if you would consent to take charge of a case of mine, which is to be called to-morrow.”

“To-morrow!” repeated Bergan, in much surprise. “That is very short notice.”

“I know it. But it is of the greatest consequence to me that the case should be tried at this time, and not carried over to another term. It was in the hands of Squire Fielder, one of our Williston lawyers; but he was taken sick this afternoon,—fell down in court, some brain difficulty or other,—and is forbidden by the physicians to do a thing. So I inquired for a lawyer that hadn’t got his hands full of business, and somebody mentioned you. I remembered your name; I happened to be North five years ago, and heard your Commencement speech, and knew what sort of a reputation you graduated with; so I quickly made up my mind that you were the man for my need. I’ve brought all the papers,—Squire Fielder’s notes and all,—he couldn’t well do less than give them to me, under the circumstances. I understand matters pretty well myself; and we’ve got the night before us. If you’ll undertake to master the case by ten o’clock to-morrow morning, I am willing to put it in your hands.”

“I will do my best,” said Bergan, after a brief consideration.

Mr. Corlew immediately began to open and sort his papers; Bergan brought writing materials, drew his chair to the opposite side of the table, and bent all the powers of his mind to the hard task before him. It was an action for ejectment, involving trial of title, and with the usual mixed and intricate character of such things; interwoven, too, with a pathetic story of misfortune. Bergan patiently examined and questioned; Mr. Corlew intelligently explained and answered. The investigation was scarce half concluded, when Bergan quietly pushed Mr. Fielder's notes aside.

"They do not help me," he explained, in answer to a glance from Mr. Corlew. "In my judgment, he has mistaken the point on which the case really hangs. At all events, I shall do better to manage it in my own way."

Midnight came and went on silent feet; the "wee, sma' hours," sacred to love rather than law, hastened, one after another, to join their numerous kin in the misty vale of the Heretofore; the stars went out like spent lamps; the dim night-silence began to stir with vague premonitions of light and sound; finally, gray dawn looked solemnly in through the windows. Then Bergan lifted his head, and pushed back the hair from his brow.

"Now leave me," he said to his companion, with unwonted sombreness. "The rest must be done by myself. I will meet you at the court-house, in good time."

He made an almost imperceptible pause. Then, looking Mr. Corlew full in the face, he said, in a tone half-assertive, half-questioning;—

"You wish to succeed in this suit?"

Mr. Corlew's eyes fell under his penetrating gaze. "Of course I do," he answered a little surlily. "What else am I here for?"

Bergan seemed to muse for a moment. "Well," said he, at length, in the tone of a man who recalls his thoughts from an episodical flight to the main subject, "I think you

may reasonably expect success, if your witnesses testify as is here set down. The law is clearly in your favor."

"I am glad to hear it," returned Mr. Corlew, heartily. Yet he looked slightly annoyed, none the less; and his "Good morning," as he went out, was a little stiff.

Bergan leaned back in his chair, folded his arms, and knitted his brow. He looked like a man assailed by some miserable doubt or suspicion, which yet he is half-inclined to regard as illegitimate.

"It is a necessity of my profession," he muttered, at last; and, with a mighty effort, he tore himself free from the teasing phantom, and addressed himself anew to his work.

There is no need to burden these pages with the tedious formalities of a trial at law. Suffice it to say that Bergan conducted the case with an ease and ability that surprised his legal associates. They had looked for some nervousness, some hesitation, some solicitude, some awkwardness, in the manner of the young legal *débutant*; they could detect nothing of the sort. He made his opening speech with consummate clearness and composure; and he examined and cross-examined witnesses, quoted authorities, took exceptions, and made points, with a quiet ease, and even, at times, with a touch of listlessness, that argued excellent training and profound knowledge.

Perhaps his quietude of manner was the more perfect, that a slight cloud hung on his brow, all through the two days of the trial; though his observers were too little acquainted with the wonted expression of his face to discover it. Not till he rose to make his final speech did the shadow lift. Then, indeed, the spectators noticed a change. He had spoken but a few sentences, when his eyes kindled, his brow cleared, his voice gathered fulness and melody, he forgot himself and his doubt in the glow of an irresistible inspiration, in the glad exercise of a natural gift of oratory so wondrous, so unexpected, and so potent, that court and

spectators were alike taken by storm. Only in dim tradition had such a speech ever been heard in that court room,—so fluent, so animated, so skilfully throwing an ideal grace around dry, bare legal facts, without dimming their outline or destroying their logical connection. People held their breath to listen, unwilling to lose one delicate shade of thought, one fit, luminous expression. Two or three times, the judge was forced to suppress outbursts of applause, in which, nevertheless, his pleased and interested face concurred; and when Bergan took his seat, gray-headed lawyers stretched their hands across the table in hearty congratulation.

A verdict for his client was almost immediately rendered. Then he stepped out into the crowd, to be met on all sides by extended hands and enthusiastic compliments. People that had always studiously avoided him, now sought to catch his eye; gentlemen who had never vouchsafed him more than a stiff nod, now waited to give him a friendly hand-grasp and a few congratulatory words. One of the magnates of the neighborhood publicly stamped him, as it were, with the seal of his high approbation, by engaging him for a few moments in conversation, and then parting from him with an intimation that he might expect an early invitation to dinner.

Turning away from the dog-day smile of this personage,—late and sultry,—Bergan encountered the meaning gaze of a pair of bleary eyes.

"Sudden change of weather," remarked Dick Causton, dryly. "'it never rains but it pours.' You are in a heavy shower, Mr. Arling."

And with unwonted consideration, Dick waited till Bergan had passed on, before he muttered, "*In picciol tempo passa ogni gran pioggia*,—a heavy shower is soon over."

Dr. Remy came next. "I never sing in chorus," said he, shrugging his shoulders, and putting his hands behind

him; "I shall keep my compliments for a day of dearth. But what a weathercock is public opinion!"

Yet the change was not altogether so sudden and radical as it appeared. Bergan's upright, independent course of conduct, so quietly persisted in, through all these months, despite every discouragement, had at last begun to tell upon the prejudices of the community. Mrs. Lyte's warm advocacy and indignant protest, in her small circle, had also had its weight. Probably both would have availed much earlier, but for the curiously infelicitous language in which Dr. Remy had all along chosen to couch his responses to such persons as had approached him in relation to Bergan's character and habits.

"As talented a fellow as ever lived," he replied to one inquirer,—“and as deep a one. Ah! he knows well what he's about!"

"Sober?" he answered another,—“certainly; as sober as an anchorite. I hope he will keep so."

"Mr. Arling is my neighbor and friend, as friendship goes," he said to another; "I neither make, nor listen to, derogatory remarks about him. If you want confirmation for your prejudice, go elsewhere. I am not in that line."

Intentionally or not, Dr. Remy's cool cynicism rather damaged than helped Bergan's cause.

Nevertheless, the steadfast testimony of his upright life remained, and could not be wholly ignored. The feeling was fast becoming general that the young man deserved somewhat better at the hands of the community than he had received. And the feeling would doubtless have manifested itself in good time, and with due caution, if Bergan's unexampled success in the court-room had not fairly dazzled out of sight the last lingering shadow of prejudice, and caused a popular reaction toward the other extreme of enthusiastic admiration and approval,—a reaction all the stronger because spurred on by a lurking sense of past injustice.

Moreover, the little, sleepy town, whose intellectual brilliants were few, and not of the first water, naturally felt that it could not afford to ignore the fine talent which had so suddenly blazed out in its midst, and which might be regarded as, in some sense, of its own creation.

"He really belongs to us, you know," remarked one townsman proudly to another. "He comes of the Bergans of Bergan Hall, on the mother's side,—good old aristocratic stock. And he's an honor to it!"

And so, as has been said before, Bergan's exit from the court-room was a scene of triumph that might easily have turned an older head, and quickened the beating of a chiller heart.

But Bergan took it all quietly, gravely,—almost indifferently. The cloud had settled back upon his brow, and never stirred for any compliment, or congratulation, or friendliness. Most persons attributed it to wounded pride, not yet healed. In the midst of the ovation, they believed that he kept a rankling remembrance of the coldness and neglect which had preceded it. One observer only, a little clearer eyed than the rest, said to him :—

"You look tired."

"And well he may!" responded Mr. Corlew, standing by with a face of unalloyed satisfaction. "He never saw the case until evening before last ; and he has not slept for two nights."

There was another, and a stronger, burst of admiration, mingled with wonder ; but the complacent, satisfied tone of Mr. Corlew's voice only deepened the shadow on Bergan's brow. Quickly extricating himself from both crowd and client, he walked swiftly home, meditating, as he went, upon the seeming churlishness of human existence, in that it never gives us what we want, or gives it only in such way and shape as to neutralize its sweetness.

What, then, was the drop of bitterness in his cup of triumph ?

Not the paltry pride that had been attributed to him, nor yet the depressing reaction that comes after excitement, but an uneasy suspicion that he had helped to do an injustice. He had discovered,—or seemed to discover,—as the intricacies of the recent case had unfolded themselves before him, that law and justice stood on opposite sides of it. Of his client's legal right to the property in dispute, admitting his statements to be true, there seemed to be no question; but of his moral right to it, as well as of his own personal integrity, and that of his principal witness, Bergan had grave doubts. And these doubts had followed him, and planted a heavy footstep on his conscience, all the way down through the trial. For he was still young, his personal conscience tender, and his professional one undeveloped. His duty as a man, and his duty as a lawyer, had not yet distinctly separated themselves into opposing segments.

So, while the whole town was ringing with the fame of his successful legal *début*, he sat moodily in his office, a prey to troubled and half-regretful thought, until Sleep, so long defrauded of her rights, stole upon him in his chair, and held him fast prisoned in her soft embrace.

IX.

THE FIRST LINKS OF A CHAIN.

“**I** DON'T beg pardon for disturbing you,” said Doctor Remy, giving the sleeper a vigorous shake. “You are in as fair a way to catch your death of cold, as your worst enemy could wish you to be.”

Bergan slowly opened his eyes and stared vacantly around him. The doctor's words, though they had reached his ears, had not penetrated to his understanding. As yet, he was but half cognizant of his whereabouts, not at all of his circumstances.

“Come, up with you!” persisted the doctor, “and take a turn round the room, to get the chill out of your blood. Man alive! what were you thinking of, to go to sleep before that window, with such a damp wind blowing in?”

“I did not mean to,” responded Bergan, drowsily. And his eyes closed again.

“Did not mean to!” repeated Doctor Remy, in a tone of ineffable contempt. “You might at least have vouchsafed me a newer excuse: that is worn threadbare. It has served the whole human race, from Eve over her apple, down to Cathie over her last broken doll. Nobody ‘means’ to do anything. Except me—I ‘mean’ to wake you up.” And the doctor gave Bergan another uncompromising shake.

“It is so good to sleep!” remonstrated the young man, in the same drowsy tone.

“It is so good to have the rheumatism, or that cream of delights known hereabout as the broken-bone fever!”

returned the doctor, with cool irony. "However," he added, indifferently, turning away, "*chacun à son goût.*"

"You surely do not mean to leave him, in that way, Doctor," said a rebuking voice, beneath the window. Miss Lyte, fastening up a rosebush, in the dusk outside, had heard the whole.

"Certainly not, if it pleases you to wish otherwise," replied the doctor, gallantly.

And returning to the charge, Doctor Remy did not remit his efforts until he had gotten the half-vexed young man upon his feet, and forced him to pace two or three times up and down the office. Thereupon Bergan was fain to avow that his limbs were stiff and sore, and he had no mind for further exercise.

"Just as I expected," said the doctor, calmly.

Without further words, he marched Bergan off to bed, and did not let him alone, until, by dint of various outward and inward applications, he had restored natural warmth and circulation to his chilled, benumbed frame. In doing this, the young man was effectually roused; and memory and thought came back with consciousness.

"Doctor," said he, suddenly, "I almost envy you your profession."

"Why?"

"Because, as you told me at our first meeting, your duty is always plainly one thing—to save life."

"Humph! it seems to me that yours is equally plain—to save your client."

"What! whether his cause be right or wrong?"

"I save life, whether it be good or evil—a thief's or a saint's."

Bergan was silent for a moment. He felt the sophistry, but could not, on the instant, detect wherein it lay. He allowed himself to be diverted from the main question by a side issue.

"You say that *you* save life," said he, "but do you feel

that it is really you? Are you never conscious of a power above you, without whose help your efforts would avail nothing?"

"Granted, for the sake of argument," replied Doctor Remy, composedly. "Then you may believe that it is not your efforts which gain a cause, but the 'power above,' of which you speak."

It is not often that a side issue leads so directly back to the main point as in this instance, thanks to Doctor Remy's mode of treating it. "I see," said Bergan, musingly, "the difference is in the intent. Of course, God does decide the event, or consequence,—*that* is beyond us. He can frustrate our best efforts, or crown them with success, as He pleases. Our business, then, is with motives—and aims—and means." (The last clauses came slowly, and in the natural, if not the logical, order of thought.) "It is only after we have made sure that those three are right," he went on, "that we are freed from responsibility, and can comfortably leave results to God."

"All very fine," returned Doctor Remy, coolly. "But it seems to me that our motives, means, and aims (that is to say, yours and mine) are the same. Motive, love of life; means, a profession; aim, money,—which though in itself only a means, is the most convenient representative of all that it will buy; that is, all that supports life, and enhances its enjoyments."

"I hope you are not serious," replied Bergan, gravely. "I should be sorry to think that any man—much less a man with your talent, culture, and opportunities for benefiting his fellows—could be satisfied with so poor an ambition as that."

Doctor Remy slightly raised his eyebrows. "My dear fellow," said he, "if you do not follow your profession for the sake of the money that you expect it to bring you, what *do* you follow it for?"

"Money is one object, of course," answered Bergan,

"but I hope it is not the only one, nor even the chief one. When my mind takes a leap into the future, it is not so much fees that I think of, as wrongs to be redressed, and rights to be protected, and influence to be gained and exercised,—yes, and fame and independence to be won."

"All very good things," returned Doctor Remy, smiling; "and all very dependent on those same fees, of which you think so little. Without money, you will not do much for right, nor against wrong; neither can you be independent, or famous, or influential."

"I do not know about that," rejoined Bergan, smiling. "Certainly, it was not his riches that made Diogenes independent. Neither does the name of Howard borrow any of its lustre from gold. Nor—to come down to our own time—is Mr. Islay influential on account of his wealth."

"Mr. Islay influential!" repeated Doctor Remy, contemptuously. "In what way, let me ask?"

"In a hundred ways. Every week, his words, his thoughts, go into scores of hearts and homes, for warning, for comfort, for inspiration; and reappear constantly in human lives. Certain sentences of his last Sunday's sermon have been ringing in my ears all day. And only three or four days ago, Miss Lyte, under the influence of that same suggestive discourse, asked me how far I thought one was justified in a purely negative use of a talent,—that is, in merely refraining from doing harm, rather than trying actively to do good. And these are only two examples, you see, where there are doubtless many."

"Priests easily influence women," said the doctor, scornfully.

"Women!" exclaimed Bergan, stretching out a stalwart arm toward the doctor. "Are not those the muscles and sinews of a man?"

"I beg your pardon," said the Doctor, laughing, "I had forgotten what was the first of your two examples. Still, that sort of influence would never suffice for me. If

I cared for anything of the kind, it would be for power,—direct, absolute power over men's acts and lives. But as that belongs only to kings and generals, I am content to do with—”

He hesitated.

“Well, what?” said Bergan.

“Wealth—when I get it,” answered the doctor. “Wealth, and what it brings; ease, leisure, unlimited opportunity and means for the cultivation of the intellect.”

“The intellect, then, is your final object, your ultimate good?” said Bergan.

“Yes; it is the one thing which distinguishes man from the brutes,” replied the doctor.

“With the soul,” rejoined Bergan.

“A word without an idea,” returned the doctor,—“unless, indeed, you mean to apply it to that life-principle, which belongs to plants and animals, as well as men.”

Bergan looked amazed. “Do you really make no distinction,” he asked, “between mind and soul?”

“None. To me, they are synonymous terms.”

“Is it from the intellect, then,” said Bergan, “that the moral sense comes?”

Doctor Remy's lips opened for a reply, but closed again in silence. And, knowing that he was never at a loss for a rejoinder, Bergan suspected that the words so suddenly cut off from utterance were of a franker character than his second thought approved. Before his less impromptu answer was ready, Bergan, following out some rapid, unexplained train of thought, asked;—

“Doctor, did you ever feel remorse?”

“Never. That is a disease. I am in health.”

“But, doctor,” persisted Bergan, “should you call that a healthy body, which was incapable of feeling pain? Should you not rather say that it was paralyzed, or ossified?”

"Just as I should say that it was inflamed, if mere pressure caused it acute pain," answered Doctor Remy.

Bergan looked unconvinced.

"I do not mean that I never feel regret," explained the doctor. "I have often been angry with myself for having been guilty of a mistake."

"A mistake," repeated Bergan, doubtfully. "Do you mean a sin?"

"I will not be particular about terms," replied Doctor Remy, shrugging his shoulders. "But I prefer my own, as better expressing my ideas."

Bergan looked a little bewildered. The doctor again condescended to explain.

"Like you," said he, "I hold it to be every man's duty to make the most of his life,—his talents, time, and health. If he so act as to hinder the development, or impair the value and efficiency, of any of these, does it make any practical difference whether we call it a sin or a mistake?"

"None," answered Bergan, with scorn that he could not repress; "except that it narrows everything,—aim, responsibility, hope, faith, desire, and fulfilment,—down to man's miserable self!"

"Well," said the doctor, coldly, "bring me the most signal example of heroism, disinterestedness, charity,—what you like,—that you can find; and I will point out to you a plain germ of selfishness at the bottom of it."

"What of that?" replied Bergan, with kindling eyes. "Because we can never wholly get rid of self, in this lower life, does it therefore follow that we must concentrate our thoughts and aims upon it? Must we forever deny ourselves the ennobling, elevating, softening influence of a duty and a hope outside of ourselves; an object of affection, trust, and desire, higher than ourselves?"

Bergan reached out for a book, found a marked passage, and read aloud.

"Take the example of a dog, and mark what a gener-

osity and courage he will put on, when he finds himself maintained by a man, who, to him, is instead of a God, or *melior natura*; which courage is manifestly such as that creature, without that confidence in a nature better than his own, could never attain. So man, when he resteth and assureth himself upon Divine protection and favor, gathereth a force and faith which human nature would not otherwise obtain.' ”

“I deny—” began Dr. Remy, with his wonted audacity. But, at this moment, his office-boy, Scipio, thrust his woolly head in the door with the laconic intimation,—

“Sent for, massa. Drefful hurry.”

“And in good time,” laughed the doctor. “I was forgetting my professional duty to you,—which was, to have left you long ago to the sleep which you so much need, and which you may now safely and profitably take. Good night.”

For some moments, Bergan lay thinking over the conversation. Never had Dr. Remy's low and limited notions of life been so nakedly presented to his abhorrent gaze. A certain distrust and dread awoke within him, accompanied by a chill creeping of the flesh, as at something not altogether human. It impressed him that there was a dark and sinister peculiarity about this man, with the rarely cultivated intellect and the inert affections,—this man whom he had so long called his friend, and who, so far as he knew, had not ill deserved the name;—a peculiarity that could not fail to be pernicious to lives and characters too intimately connected with him. Running over in his mind the whole course of their acquaintance, he could not remember ever to have heard the doctor give utterance to one lofty aspiration, one purely benign impulse, one word of hearty sympathy or generous affection. His opinions and beliefs were chill products of the intellect, unwarmed by any glow of the affections, unpurified by any strict assay of conscience. And Bergan was just beginning to discover that,

while pretending to great breadth and depth, they were really narrow, because limited to life and earth, and shallow, because never penetrating below or above the reach of the human intellect, when his thoughts suddenly began to grow vague and dim, as if seen through a mist, and the next moment, he was sound asleep.

Meanwhile, much to his surprise, as well as gratification, Doctor Remy was hastening toward Bergan Hall. Maumer Rue being suddenly seized with alarming symptoms, the Major's head man, Ben, had been despatched to Berganton, with instructions not to return without a physician. In his haste and anxiety, it had not occurred to the Major to make any exception; though he retained a sufficiently angry reminiscence of Doctor Remy's cool and satirical demeanor, on the occasion of his ill-fated visit of reconciliation to Bergan, to have prompted one, if he had bethought himself of it in time.

Ben, therefore, having sought two other representatives of the medical profession without success, finally presented himself at Dr. Remy's office. There the doctor found him, on quitting Bergan's room; and in very brief space of time, the two were driving swiftly up the long avenue, through a moonlight that was scarcely less illuminative than sunshine, and far more beautifying, by reason of the soft charm with which it enhanced beauties while it concealed defects.

It was the first time that Doctor Remy had entered upon the territory of Bergan Hall. He was surprised both at its extent, and its signs of opulence. As he passed the stately, deserted mansion,—showing so fair in the moonlight, under its grand, sheltering oaks,—and came in sight of the populous negro-quarter, and the far stretch of cultivated fields beyond, his face was alive not only with interest, but with something deeper still; it might be calculation.

“A fair inheritance!” he said to himself. “Miss Astra

will be a most eligible *parti*. I wonder if that will is made ! ”

The Major was standing in the door of his cottage, as the buggy drove up with the doctor.

“ So it’s *you*, is it ? ” was his curt salutation. And his tone and look said plainly enough, “ I wish it were anybody else ! ”

But Doctor Remy, though generally armed at all points against such looks and tones, now seemed to take no notice. “ Yes,” said he, good-naturedly, “ it is I. Harris and Gerrish were both out, and Ben had to take me or nobody. Allow me to assure you that he chose wisely, for, if the case be what I suspect, from his account, it does not admit of delay. It follows, therefore, that the sooner I am introduced to the patient, the better.”

If the doctor had been studying his speech for the last half-hour, it could not have been more skilfully constructed. The Major’s irritation instantly gave way, partly melted by the doctor’s good humor, partly forgotten in a sudden rush of anxiety.

“ Come on, then,” said he, turning to lead the way to old Rue’s cabin, which was but a little way from the cottage. As they approached, painful gasps and groans were distinctly heard from within.

On the doorstep, Major Bergan paused. “ She is my old, faithful nurse,” said he, feelingly. “ Spare nothing,—no skill, nor trouble, nor expense,—no more than if she were the first lady of the county.”

A kind of spasm crossed his rugged features, and throwing himself down on a bench beside the door, he left the doctor to enter alone.

X.

FEELING HIS WAY.

RUE was lying on her bed, propped up by pillows into a half-sitting posture. Her breath came raspingly and painfully, and she had the dingy pallor where-with disease is wont to write itself on the African face.

"Is it death?" she asked, hoarsely, when the doctor had finished his examination. "Because, if it is, I should be glad to know in time to send for Master Bergan,—I mean, Mr. Arling."

Doctor Remy looked down upon the blind woman with a grave,—almost a frowning, face—which she could not see.

"So you are attached to Mr. Arling," said he.

"Certainly, sir," replied Rue, simply. "He is Miss Eleanor's son, you know."

If Doctor Remy did not know, he could easily understand. He was aware that the daughter of a Southern house remains "Miss Eleanor" (or whatever the Christian name might be) to the end of her days, with the dusky home population, although, in the meantime, she may have become a great-grandmother. Moreover, various scattered shreds of rumor came to his recollection, enough to afford a tolerably accurate explanation of the blind woman's reason for desiring to see Bergan Arling at her bedside. And though the matter would seem to be no concern of his, it is certain that he gave it a moment or two of profound study, ere he answered the question which Rue had addressed to him. Indeed, it was very much Doctor Remy's habit—as it is that of selfish natures in general—to con-

sider all events mainly with reference to their bearing upon his own interests, and to hold them important or trivial, according to the degree of favorable or adverse influence which they would be likely to exert upon his fortunes.

The doctor's reflections were short and swift. To the bystanders, there seemed to be only the natural, deliberate pause of the careful physician, before deciding upon the case presented to him. Nor was Rue's patience greatly tried, ere his answer to her question was ready for her.

"Your case is not desperate, this time," said he, "though I can see that it is painful. Your cold, being unwisely left to run its own course, has resulted in inflammation of the throat, and, partially, of the lungs. But it is not beyond present relief, nor permanent cure, I think. At least, we shall soon see."

There was no question of Doctor Remy's professional skill. In Berganton, his scientific superiority had early been recognized by the community, and tacitly conceded by his medical brethren. Yet he could hardly be said to be popular, even with his patients. There was no affection mingled with the respect accorded to his talent. It was intuitively felt, if not clearly understood and expressed, that, though he brought every resource of science to the sick-chamber, he brought nothing else. He was as cold and pitiless as his own steel probe or lance. And there are times when a deep, human sympathy, on the part of the physician, is as real a medicament to the sufferer, as any set down in the pharmacopœia; in which fact many a genial quack finds his account. It had come, therefore, to be very much the Berganton habit to reserve Doctor Remy's skill for severe accidents, for consultations, for the awful conflict of life and death over wasted forms writhing with sharp pain, or locked in moveless stupor. But the thousand pettier ills of life, which asked for tender consideration almost as imperatively as for medicine, preferred to commit themselves to the fatherly kindness of good old

Doctor Harris, or the warm-hearted enthusiasm of the last medical arrival,—Doctor Gerrish, whose scientific attainments had, as yet, to be taken for granted, but whose smile was a veritable cordial.

It was Doctor Remy's fate, therefore, to stand by many deathbeds,—where he comported himself much more like a baffled and beaten general than a sympathetic, sorrow-stricken friend. It was also his frequent privilege to see the life-forces rally and stand fast, under his generalship, to begin anew the fight that seemed wellnigh over, to win back, inch by inch, the ground that had been lost, and finally to stand a conqueror on the field. Even then, those most indebted to his skill were often chilled to see how little the cold triumph of his face had to do with their deep heart gladness. Nevertheless, this was the position wherein the doctor appeared at his best,—as now at Rue's bedside.

For some reason,—probably as a step to Major Bergan's favor,—he was putting forth all his skill. In one respect, he was always admirable : he never hesitated to put his professional hand to any business that might seem to belong more properly to the nurse. Rue's attendants were ignorant and awkward ; if Doctor Remy had not helped to carry his orders into effect, progress would have been slow. As it was, the treatment was prompt and effective. In about an hour, the acute pains had ceased, respiration had become less difficult, and Rue having devoutly thanked the doctor, under God, for relief so speedy and so grateful, had turned on her side for a complete self-surrender to the delightful drowsiness that was stealing over her.

Coming out, Dr. Remy found Brick waiting for him, on the bench where he had left the Major.

"Is gramma goin' to get well?" he asked, anxiously.

"Certainly,—in a few days," returned the doctor.

"Where is your master?"

The negro pointed to the Major's cottage. "Ole

massa is thar," he answered. "He tole me, when you's t'rough, to ax you to come an' see him."

The doctor turned in the direction indicated, but was plainly in no hurry to reach the goal. He walked very leisurely, stopping, now and then, to look round on the moonlit landscape. Not till he seemed to have settled some knotty point to his satisfaction, did he enter the cottage.

The Major was seated at the table, with his bottle and glass before him. He did not need to ask Doctor Remy how the case had gone; *that* had already been made known to him by the mouths of half-a-dozen eager messengers. He merely said, in a tone that was half a protest;—

"I never expected to be so much obliged to you, Doctor Remy. I should be sorry to lose my faithful old nurse. She is the last link between me and my early days. Is she out of danger?"

"For the present, yes. And in the morning, I will look in to see how she goes on,—that is, if you wish."

"I shall take it as a favor," returned the Major, in a tone that was almost courteous. "Sit down, before you go, and take a drink."

Doctor Remy quietly took a chair, but shook his head at the proffered glass. "No, thank you," said he. "We physicians need to keep our heads clear and our nerves steady; and brandy does not conduce to either."

"It never hurt mine," answered Major Bergan, rather surlily, as if he suspected a covert insinuation in the doctor's words.

"Perhaps not," replied Dr. Remy, indifferently. And, glancing out of the open window, he added, "A fine place you have here."

"The finest in the county," replied the Major, with frank pride. "That is, as far as soil and crops are concerned. The old Hall is out of repair, to be sure, but it can be restored to its former grandeur, whenever I see fit."

Dr. Remy gave his host a long, penetrating, comprehensive look. "I should advise you not to neglect the work too long," he observed, gravely, "if you have it much at heart."

Major Bergan set down the glass that was on its way to his lips, and looked wonderingly at his guest.

"Why?" he asked.

"Because a man of your age, with your habits, breaks down soon, when once he begins."

"My habits!" growled the Major, drawing his eyebrows into a heavy frown, "what do you mean, you insolent scamp?"

"I mean," replied Doctor Remy, composedly, "habits at once active, careless, and self-indulgent; such as riding or walking in the heat of the day, spending hours in the rice fields, rising early and sitting up late, eating *ad libitum*, and drinking *ad infinitum*."

The summary was too truthful, and the tone too professional, for the Major to retain his unreasonable anger. He merely asked,—“How do you know that I do these things?”

“By your looks.”

“Pshaw!” exclaimed Major Bergan, with a scornful curl of the lip.

Doctor Remy smiled, with the calm unconcern of a man who knows his ground. “Your looks tell me more than that,” said he.

“If they tell you anything but that I am well,—perfectly well,—they lie,” answered the Major, bluntly.

“I am glad to hear it,” replied Doctor Remy. “Doubtless, then, you sleep sound and soft.”

“No, I don’t,” grumbled the Major, with unsuspecting frankness, “I sleep like a man tossed in a blanket.”

“And probably you have pleasant dreams.”

“On the contrary, a perfect Bedlam of furies and horrors.”

“And I suppose that you never have headaches, or dizziness, or vagueness and loss of sight.”

“I have them all,” growled the Major, with an oath, “every miserable item of them. I had an attack, about a fortnight ago, that actually laid me up in bed for a day ! I wonder what it all means !”

Doctor Remy forebore to signalize his victory by so much as a triumphant look. “It means,” he answered, quietly, “that you will be none the worse for a little medicine in the house, as a provision for future attacks of the sort.”

And opening his pocket medicine-case, Doctor Remy selected three or four small phials, and began to measure, mix, and fold up powders, with a dexterity that it pleased the Major to witness. He noticed, too, that the doctor's brow was deeply knit as he prosecuted his task, and that he held one of the phials suspended, for a moment, over the small square of paper, before discharging its contents. All this looked as if his case was getting due consideration, and the Major was proportionably gratified.

Doctor Remy ended by pushing a dozen or more of tiny folded papers across the table. “Take one, in water, every two hours,” said he, “till the symptoms abate,—that is, of course, when you have another attack. There are enough for several occasions ; I know you do not like to send for a doctor, if it can be avoided. At the same time,” he added, “take care to drop those careless habits that I mentioned.”

The last sentence brought a cloud to Major Bergan's brow ; but the doctor gave it time to dissipate while he packed his medicine case, and chatted pleasantly about its convenient arrangements. “And now,” said he, rising, “what else can I do for you ?”

“Nothing, that I know of,” replied the Major, “except it be to present your bill. What else *can* a doctor do ?”

“Several things,” answered Doctor Remy, lightly. “Make your will, for instance.”

The Major laughed outright. "I should say that was a lawyer's business," said he.

"So it is. But do you not know that I once belonged to the bar?"

"I do remember hearing something of the sort, now that you remind me of it," rejoined the Major dryly. "I don't think any the better of you for it."

"Nor any the worse, I hope," returned Doctor Remy, placidly. "At all events, I always advise my patients to make their wills. There is nothing like a mind at rest about the future, to prolong life." He seemed to speak carelessly, yet he fastened a keen look on the Major's face, nevertheless.

The latter only smiled. "When I want my will made," said he, coolly, "I will employ you to do the job."

"He has made it already, as he said he would," thought Doctor Remy to himself. "And the chances are that he won't live to alter it."

"I shall be very much at your service," he answered, aloud. "And now, I must be getting townward; I have to see another patient this evening."

The Major followed him out, and stood for some moments watching the retreating buggy. Doctor Remy, looking back, saw him there in the moonlight, and a strange, furtive look came into his eyes.

"I have given 'Providence' a chance," said he to himself. "Let us see what it does with it."

Major Bergan, meanwhile, was muttering,—“What did he mean, I wonder, by talking to me about my will? It is certainly no concern of his. Does he really think me near death?” And the Major shivered, as if there had been an uncomfortable chill in the thought.

"Uncle Harry," said a clear, sweet voice, close at his elbow. He started, and turned quickly round.

A slender, girlish shape,—a graceful head, drooping like a lily on its stem,—a fair, pure, bright face,—this was

the vision that confronted him, and carried him back to his youth, and to the love of his youth; the untoward course of which had doubtless helped to make him the man that he was.

"Clarissa!" he exclaimed, trembling, and feeling as if he were in a dream.

The vision smiled. "Do you not know me, uncle?" it asked, in its sweet tones; "I am Carice."

"Ah!" said the Major, slowly, and as if but half awake. He took his niece's hands, and gazed earnestly in her face. "You are like your mother, child, or like what she was at your age, much more than you are like the child that used to play around my knees,—let me see, —six—eight—nine years ago. I missed her, Carice, when she stopped coming, I missed her."

"She missed you, too, uncle," replied Carice. "She was very fond of you."

"Then why did she stop coming?" asked the Major, gloomily.

"Because, uncle," answered Carice, simply, "she grew old enough to know that it is a child's duty to obey, and not to question."

The Major's brow darkened; but he looked sad, too. "I never laid it up against *you*, Carice," he said, with significant emphasis.

"Nor against any one, I hope," replied Carice, coaxingly. "Oh, uncle, ought not this long feud to cease?"

Major Bergan shook his head. "There is no feud between you and me, child," said he. "But, as for your father," he went on, with a kindling eye and a roughening voice, "when *he*—"

Carice laid her hand upon his arm. "As you were just saying," said she, gently, "he is my father. And, dear uncle, a daughter's ear is easily hurt."

The Major stopped, and nearly choked himself with the sentence so suddenly arrested on his lips. "Then, what

are you here for?" he finally blurted out, half-wonderingly, half-sternly.

"Ah!" exclaimed Carice, in a tone of sudden recollection, "I had nearly forgotten my errand, in the pleasure of seeing you."

The Major's face grew soft again. He put his hands on Carice's shoulders, turned her toward the full moonlight, and looked long and earnestly in her face. "How beautiful you have grown!" said he, with even more of wonder than admiration in his voice; "I am not sure but that you are still more beautiful than *she* was. But you don't look as if you belonged to this earth, child; and there's not a bit of the family look left in you. Are you certain that you are Carice Bergan, and not a changeling?"

"Quite sure, uncle," she answered, smiling. "Ask Rosa, there, if I am not." She pointed to her maid, who had accompanied her, and stood waiting near.

"Then, Miss Bergan," said the Major, making her a courtly bow, "what can your old uncle do for you?"

"Nothing, at present," she replied, "except to let me keep my own, old corner in his heart. I only came to see Maumer Rue, if I may. We heard she was dying. So I begged hard to be allowed to come and tell her that I had not forgotten how kind she used to be to me, and to see if I could do anything for her. I fancied it would please her to see me, if she is still able to recognize me. Is she?"

"Perfectly able," replied Major Bergan, "and will be, I hope, for years to come. She has been very ill, but she is much better. She is now asleep."

"Then I will not disturb her," returned Carice. "And yet, I am loath to go back without a glimpse of her. Could I not look in upon her for one moment? I will be sure not to make a sound."

Major Bergan led her to Rue's cabin, and waited on the threshold, while, with her finger on her lips, to guard

against any outburst of astonishment from the negro woman in attendance, she stole softly to the bedside, and bent over the sleeping Rue. A wondrously lovely picture she made there,—a picture of such unearthly grace, delicacy, and purity, that the Major's eyes filled with unconscious moisture as he gazed.

Suddenly Rue's lips parted, in a dream. "The Bergan star!" said she. "See! it rises!" And, after a moment, she added, decidedly, "He *shall* have Bergan Hall!"

Carice quickly stole out to her uncle. His face looked very gloomy, as he led her back toward the cottage.

"Carice," said he, suddenly, "have you seen your Western cousin?"

"Bergan Arling? Yes, certainly," she answered.

"How do you like him?"

"He seems very pleasant," she replied, evasively.

"Seems!" repeated her uncle, gruffly. "What is the matter with him?"

"I do not know, uncle. It is said that he is very dissipated."

The Major laughed ironically. "Nonsense! The most incorrigible milksop that ever I saw," said he. "That is why we quarrelled."

Carice looked at him doubtfully. "The very first thing that we heard of him," said she, "was that he had been mixed up in a low brawl at Gregg's tavern."

"All my fault, Carice," returned Major Bergan, shortly. "I took him there, and cheated him into swallowing a glass of raw brandy."

Carice's blue eyes looked a sorrowful astonishment.

"I did not mean to do him any harm," pursued the Major, answering their mute eloquence; "I only wanted to teach him to drink like a man and a Bergan. I loved the boy, Carice, like my own son, and would have kept him with me, if I could. But he forsook me for the law, the ungrateful dog!"

"Perhaps he had no choice," suggested Carice.

"No choice! Didn't he have the choice of Bergan Hall, and all that belongs to it? That was what was running in Maumer Rue's head, just now. But he preferred independence—and a tin sign in his window! He is a degenerate scion of the race, like your—" The Major suddenly recollected himself, and broke off with a dry cough.

Carice was looking down thoughtfully. An unexpected clue to Bergan's character, motives, and aims, had been put into her hands; and she was slowly trying to follow it out.

"Thank you, uncle, for telling me this," said she, at length. "I am afraid we have been doing Bergan an injustice."

"You certainly have, if you have thought him a drunkard," replied the Major. "But, nevertheless, he's no true Bergan, Carice; don't have anything to do with him."

"No more than is just and right," said Carice, quietly. "And now I must go; mamma will be getting anxious. Come a little way with me, uncle, as you used to do."

The Major walked by her side down to the creek, and watched her anxiously across the dilapidated bridge.

"Don't come that way again," he called to her, as she reached the other end. "It's unsafe."

"Mend it then, uncle," she called back to him. "For I like old paths—and old friends—best."

The Major turned away with a smile. And all the way to the cottage he was saying to himself,—

"Perhaps I *had* better make my will."

XI.

SLEEPLESS NIGHTS APPOINTED.

DOCTOR REMY possessed in perfection the power of rapid concentration of thought. Otherwise, he would have taken a divided mind to the bedside of his second patient, that night, after leaving Bergan Hall. As it was, he was glad when the stroke of midnight set him free, body and mind; the one to find its way mechanically to the hotel, through the silent moonlighted streets of Berganton, the other to occupy itself in arranging and perfecting the details of a certain plan for his future advantage, which had suddenly shaped itself out before him, so distinctly, if roughly, that he had already taken an important step toward its accomplishment. It now remained to provide for the rest of the way.

The midnight heaven was without a cloud, and the moon filled it with white radiance. Every object down the long line of the town's principal street was shown with the clearness of noonday, but also with the ghostlike awfulness that moonlight is wont to impart to objects the most familiar. The large, wooden houses, with their broad, shadowy piazzas and dim doorways; the wide, empty sidewalks; the great, shining-leaved oaks, dotting the silvered highway with black islands of shadow; the narrow wheel-track, with its broad margin of grass and weeds, through which an isolated footpath took its solitary way to every gate;—all were distinctly visible, but with a singularity of aspect that seemed to change their whole character and meaning.

And perhaps something of the same effect extended to

the countenance of Doctor Remy, as he came down the street, followed by the dreary echo of his own lonely footsteps, as if dogged by immitigable fate. To his features, as to all other objects, the moonlight seemed to impart a new expression. Those who were best acquainted with him, had any such been abroad, would have needed to look twice at his dark moody countenance, and the ominous gleam of his deepset eyes, to feel themselves quite sure of his identity. Continuing to brood over the casual encounter, as they pursued their way, they might have tried to divine what sombre energy of purpose it was that had lit his eyes with such deep, dusky light, and marked his brow and eyes with lines so sternly rigid; shuddering, too, to think how remorselessly he would sweep from his terribly direct, if underground, path, whatever object should intervene between himself and his goal. Then, seeing how the moonbeams had subtilized some mean hovel into a phantom palace or tomb, wrought of alternate silver and ebony, they would be fain to set down both the origin and substance of their reflections to the same magical agency, and breathe more freely in making haste to forget the whole matter.

Secure in the absence of all observation, the dark face kept on its way through the silent street, giving its features the fullest liberty of evil expression. Opposite the principal dry goods store of the street, it paused for a moment; its restless glance had caught sight of a faint gleam from one of the rear shutters, which was plainly not moonlight.

"They are up late," muttered the doctor, "or there is mischief afoot. Well! what is it to me? Have I not enough else to think of?" And he kept on his rapid way.

But the incident seemed to have set free the faculty of speech. Words began to drop from his set lips; short, disconnected sentences, through which, nevertheless, there ran a distinct thread of suggestion.

"I have waited long enough,"—so ran one of these

half-involuntary utterances,—“I have waited long enough for Fortune’s willing favors; it is time to grapple with the exasperating jade, and wring them from her reluctant hands, by fair means or foul. For what else was I endowed with talent, daring, energy, and will, beyond most men? Not, certainly, to waste them all in earning a bare subsistence, or little more, as I am now doing.”

“Is it my fault,” he went on, in broken, detached sentences,—“is it my fault that Fortune never shows herself to me, save at the farther end of some dark vista which the world calls crime?—Pshaw! what is a life, one worthless, drunken, half-worn-out life, in comparison with the ends that I have in view,—increase of knowledge, expansion and perfection of science, and through them—as a casual end, I do not pretend that it is a direct one, for *me*—the advancement of the human race.—The plan seems feasible, as much so, at least, as anything can be, in this miserable, mocking world, where Fate seems to delight in balking the best talent and deranging the artfullest contrivance.—Fate, Chance, or Providence, which? Three different terms for the same thing;—language would be more accurate, if there were less of it.—At any rate, I have given Providence a chance. Let it take the responsibility of the result.—If that will be not made! But to whom else should he give the place? He cannot abide either his brother or his nephew. And Miss Lyte comes next. Besides, there are ways of finding a will, at need. The essential point is, that no other be made.”

He was now nearing Mrs. Lyte’s house, and the sight of it prompted his next sentence.

“Astra!—there, at least, the way is easy. Only, it must be secret;—I doubt if the old Major would altogether relish me for his heir, despite to-night’s increase of cordiality.—As for Arling, it is said that history—”

Dr. Remy broke off suddenly. The subject of his soliloquy was calmly looking at him across Mrs. Lyte’s gate.

"Pardon me for interrupting your conversation," said Bergan, with a smile which satisfied the doctor that he had not heard what he was saying. "One's talks with one's self are sometimes very interesting."

"Why are you not in bed?" asked the doctor, with a sharpness that Bergan set down to professional anxiety.

"A man who goes to bed at six may well get up at twelve," he replied, lightly, "especially if sleep forsakes him. Have you been out until this time?"

"Yes," answered the doctor, debating within himself whether he would speak of his visit to Bergan Hall, and quickly deciding in the negative, since there was little probability that Bergan would hear it from anybody else; inasmuch as the Hall led an independent, isolated life of its own, the events of which rarely made their way into the talk of the town. "It is nothing new for me to be late," he added, by way of finish to his monosyllable.

"I will walk down with you as far as the hotel," said Bergan, coming out, and closing the gate behind him. "Perhaps I may be able to pick up a few seeds of sleep on the way, which will sprout into another nap, when I return. What a night it is!"

"For lunatics—yes," said the doctor dryly.

"Among which you would doubtless class your humble servant," returned Bergan, "if you could look into his mind, at this moment."

"Very likely," rejoined Doctor Remy, indifferently; but he gave his companion a quick, keen glance, nevertheless.

Bergan was looking straight before him. "Doctor," said he, suddenly, "I believe you know the world well; what does it do to the man who goes counter to its traditions and prejudices,—whom, in short, it is pleased to look upon as a kind of modern Don Quixote?"

"Laughs at him first, hammers him next, flings him aside last," returned the doctor, sententiously.

"But if he does not mind being laughed at, bears the

hammering without flinching when he must, hammers back again when he may, and will not be flung aside, what then?" pursued Bergan.

The doctor stopped short in his walk, and looked long and searchingly in the young man's face. "Then," said he, slowly, as if the words were drawn out of him almost against his will,—“then it gives way to him, and honors its conqueror. But,” he added, “it is a long, exhausting contest. I do not advise you to try it.”

“Thank you,” answered Bergan, quietly. “I am inclined to try it, nevertheless. But here we are at the hotel. Good night.”

Doctor Remy stood on the steps of the hotel, looking moodily after him.

“What has he taken into his head now?” he asked himself.

He had not long to wait for an answer. In the morning, the light which he had noticed in the rear of the dry-goods store, found its sufficient explanation in an empty safe and rifled shelves. A week afterward, a tall, ill-favored man was arrested on suspicion of being concerned in the robbery. Two days later, it was known that Bergan Arling had positively refused to undertake his defence. In due course of time, it leaked out, through the amazed prisoner himself, that he had done so because he believed it to be no part of his professional duty to try to shield a criminal from just punishment.

XII.

A CONSULTATION.

PLAINLY, Mrs. Bergan had something on her mind, that bright spring morning. Though she poured her husband's second cup of coffee with a deliberation that seemed to promise much for its flavor, he was fain to send it back, after tasting it, with the explanatory remark :—

“ You have forgotten to smile into it, my dear ; it is not sweet enough.”

“ Eh ! ” exclaimed Mrs. Bergan, absently, extending her hand toward the cream pitcher.

“ I doubt if cream will mend the matter much,” observed Mr. Bergan, gravely. “ A lump of sugar might do, if the smile be absolutely *non est*.”

Mrs. Bergan's mind having by this time returned to the business in hand, both sugar and smile were immediately forthcoming, in sufficient measure to threaten the coffee with excess of sweets. Nevertheless, she continued to have fits of abstraction, at short intervals, until the breakfast things had been removed, and Carice had quitted the room. Then, she turned to her husband with a serious face.

“ I really think, Godfrey,” she began, “ that we owe your nephew some attention.”

“ Of what kind, pray ? ” inquired Mr. Bergan, in considerable surprise.

“ Well, it seems to me that we ought,—once, at least,—to invite him formally to dinner.”

“ Pray, what has he been doing, to place us under such an obligation ? ” asked Mr. Bergan, somewhat dryly.

Mrs. Bergan colored slightly. "I am afraid that we made a mistake at the outset," said she. "Of course, the attention was due to him then as much as now."

"I thought we agreed that the less Carice saw of him, the better," replied Mr. Bergan.

"Yes, I know. But that was because we believed him to be of intemperate habits."

Men of Godfrey Bergan's thoughtful and deliberate character, when they adopt a mistaken opinion, are wont to wedge it in so firmly among things undeniably true and just, that to dislodge it is like tearing up an oak which has rooted itself in a rock cleft. "I wish I were certain that he is not," he answered, with a slow, grave shake of the head.

Mrs. Bergan gave him a surprised look. "I don't see why you should doubt him," said she. "Everybody agrees that a more correct young man does not exist. He is always to be found in his office during office hours, attends Church regularly on Sundays, as well as at most of the occasional services, goes into but little society, and that of the very best,—what more would you have?"

"Nothing," replied her husband, "except the certainty that it will last. A drunkard's reform is so rarely a permanent thing, that one is justified in distrusting it. Though he may keep as sober as a Carthusian monk for a few months, or even for a year or two, his unhappy appetite is only a caged lion: in the first unguarded moment, it is certain to break out, and to sweep everything before it—resolution, hope, energy, and promise. Unfortunately for my nephew, perhaps, but very fortunately for ourselves, I fancy, I happen to retain a distinct recollection of my first meeting with him."

"But," urged Mrs. Bergan, "I thought Carice told you what your brother Harry said about that matter."

"With all due respect for my brother Harry," returned her husband, coolly, "I don't consider his testimony, in this

matter, to be worth much. Intemperance is, in his estimation, so very venial a sin,—not to say, so very Berganly a virtue,—that he would be sure to extenuate it, if he could.”

“He would never say what was not true,” affirmed Mrs. Bergan, decidedly.

“No, but he would look at the affair from his own point of view, and speak accordingly.”

“But your nephew left him on account of that very affair,” persisted Mrs. Bergan, “and has refused to have anything to do with him since, even with Bergan Hall held out to him as a bait.”

“In which,” rejoined Mr. Bergan, composedly, “he shows that he has more of the hereditary temper than is good for him, or any one connected with him. It is the same trait that has made Harry so bitter against us, all these years. And one feud in the family was enough—and too much.”

Mrs. Bergan began to look annoyed. While she admitted the general truth of her husband’s observations, she had an intuitive conviction of their present misapplication. Her womanly instincts were all in Bergan’s favor. But that, she knew, was no ground of effective argument.

Her husband looked at her clouded face, for a moment, and then went to her side. “Confess now, Clarissa,” said he, pleasantly, laying his hand on her shoulder, “that our nephew’s claims upon our attention would never have presented themselves so strongly to your mind, were it not for his late brilliant hit in the court room, and the sudden admiration and popularity which it has won him.”

A slight flush showed on Mrs. Bergan’s cheek; nevertheless, she met her husband’s eyes frankly. “I acknowledge that those things had their effect in making me ashamed of myself,” she answered. “But, all the time, I have had an uneasy feeling that we were not doing our duty by your sister’s son. Surely, we ought to have been the very last persons to have listened to, and acted upon,

a rumor unfavorable to him; or, if it were certain that he had made a false step, we should have been ready with our influence and countenance, to help him to retrieve himself."

"You forget, my dear," said Mr. Bergan, gently, "that it was for Carice's sake. We were thinking only of her."

"And so we did evil that good might come," returned his wife, somewhat ruefully. "But evil follows the universal law, and brings forth after its kind."

"What do you mean?" asked Mr. Bergan, looking both surprised and puzzled.

Mrs. Bergan smiled at him half-pityingly, half-sarcastically. "Oh, ye men!" she exclaimed, "if ye are wise as serpents, in matters of the intellect, ye are blind as bats, in matters of the heart."

"I am ready to admit the truth of the abstract proposition," said Mr. Bergan, quizzically, "as soon as I am made to understand in what way I furnish a proof of it."

"Don't you see," returned Mrs. Bergan, seriously, "that if ever Carice is to become over-interested in Bergan, now is the time,—now that he is presented to her imagination in the attractive light of a long neglected and misunderstood, but patient, persevering, and, finally, all-conquering hero?"

Mr. Bergan looked as if he did see—several things. "Is that the reason why you propose to throw them together?" he asked, dryly.

"Certainly," replied Mrs. Bergan, with perfect composure. "The first thing is to destroy the halo with which he is now surrounded, by bringing him into the disenchanting daylight of commonplace, everyday association. Next, we must rob him of the crown of martyrdom, so far as we are concerned, by frankly confessing that we were a little too severe upon him at first, and by doing full justice to his talents in a matter-of-fact way. Finally, we must make the most of the relationship."

"You may be right," said Mr. Bergan, after some

moments of deep thought. "Though, at first sight, it looks very much like jumping into the river, to avoid the rain."

"My dear," replied Mrs. Bergan, earnestly, "we cannot keep them apart, if we would, as matters are now turning. Twice already, we have met him at dinner parties, where he is the lion of the hour, and everybody makes much of him but ourselves; and we shall continue to do so, until the round is finished. It must be confessed that he wears his honors modestly; at times, I cannot help feeling proud of him myself."

"I never doubted his ability, nor overlooked his pleasing manners," said Mr. Bergan. "But what are they but gems on a poisoned cup, if the virus of intemperance be in his blood, or his principles be unsound?"

"The latter can hardly be the case," remarked Mrs. Bergan, "if the report be true that he refuses to have anything to do with a cause that he does not believe to be just. That seems to argue uncommon strength of principle."

"I am not so sure about that," returned Mr. Bergan, shaking his head dubiously. "Most people, I find, regard it as one of the many eccentricities of genius. Others think he only showed his shrewdness in declining to undertake a cause that he was sure to lose, after his brilliant victory in the case of Corlew vs. Kenan. Besides, he has not announced that such is to be his settled course of action. And if he did, it would seem arrogant, in so young a man. It is, in fact, judging the cause before it is tried."

"It strikes me that a man must needs judge things beforehand, where his own conscience is concerned," observed Mrs. Bergan, thoughtfully. "You would not expect him to act first, and decide afterward whether he had done right or wrong."

"In judging his own actions, he need not judge those of his fellows," replied Mr. Bergan, somewhat magisterially.

His wife could not help wondering within herself how

such judgment could well be avoided, where a course of action was involved. But she wisely forbore to press the point, and reverted to the main argument.

"At all events," said she, "if he gets to visit here frequently and familiarly, we shall have an opportunity of seeing for ourselves what his character really is. He may prove to be everything that is safe and admirable; or he and Carice may never think of each other in the way that we are contemplating. And, after all, I think we might trust our daughter; she has never shown herself silly or wilful; she is not likely to despise our judgment, or disregard our wishes."

"All the more reason why we should do our whole duty by her," rejoined Mr. Bergan, "in the way of prevention as well as cure. In such matters, parental commands generally come too late to forestall mischief; the most that they do is to prevent it from going any farther."

"True," replied Mrs. Bergan, quietly. "And I confess that I might have been more puzzled what to do, if,"—Mrs. Bergan made a slight pause, to give her words the greater effect (like a wise woman, she had kept her strongest argument until the last),—"if I were not tolerably certain that he is already engaged—or, at least, likely to become so—to Astra Lyte."

"That alters the case, indeed," said Mr. Bergan, thoughtfully. "But what reason have you for thinking so?"

"Miss Ferrars was here last evening, and she told me—in confidence, you know—that she had no doubt of it whatever. Her window overlooks Astra's studio, and she says that she often sees him there, helping Astra about her work, or watching her with the most absorbing interest, or talking to her with a very tell-tale earnestness."

"It would hardly be received as evidence in a court of justice," said Mr. Bergan, smiling, "though it sounds suggestive. But Miss Ferrars is given to gossip—'in confidence,' as you say."

His wife laughed. "Of course she is; else I should never have heard of this pleasant probability. For both pleasant and probable it certainly is. Astra is turning out a wonderfully fine, talented girl; and she and Mrs. Lyte have been Bergan's fast friends and defenders, all along. How can he show his gratitude more gracefully than by marrying her?"

"Does Carice know of this?" asked Mr. Bergan, after a moment.

"Yes; Miss Ferrars told me in her presence, and greatly shocked her by doing so. She thinks it wrong to connect names so carelessly."

"She is right," said Mr. Bergan, emphatically.

"At the same time," continued Mrs. Bergan, "she remarked that it would be a very nice thing, if it were only true. And afterward she said that she would like to renew her acquaintance with Astra;—you remember that the two were very good child-friends, though circumstances have kept them apart, of late,—as they have their mothers! I really feel guilty when I think how fond I used to be of Catherine Lyte, and how I have allowed her to slip out of my life. But then, we were both invalids, for many years, with scarce strength enough for home cares, and not a jot for friendship or society. Still, I have all my old regard for her carefully buried in my heart, like the talent in the parable; intact, if not in a way to increase. One of these days, I mean to dig it up, and go with Carice to pay her a visit, and take a look at the wonders of Astra's studio."

"I am glad to hear it," said Mr. Bergan. "Well! I suppose the conclusion of the whole matter is, that we are to give Bergan a dinner, and the freedom of the house."

"Precisely," replied Mrs. Bergan, nodding her head. "And now, I want to consult you about the invitation list."

Mr. Bergan rose hastily. "I am quite content to leave that to you, my dear."

His wife caught his arm. "You are not going to shirk the responsibility in that way," she said, decidedly. "I really want your advice. Am I to ask Dr. Remy?"

"Why not?"

"I don't quite like the man."

"I cannot see what you have against him, unless it be that he was not born in the county, and you don't know his whole pedigree."

Mrs. Bergen did not answer. She knew her dislike to be a case of spontaneous generation, and not at all qualified to give a lucid account of itself.

"Besides," continued her husband, "he is Bergen's particular friend."

"Is he?" asked Mrs. Bergen, innocently. "I did not know that he was anybody's friend."

"Clarissa!" exclaimed Mr. Bergen, rebukingly. "I never heard Dr. Remy speak ill of anybody, in all my acquaintance with him."

"Did you ever hear him speak well of anybody?" responded Mrs. Bergen,— "well enough, that is, to give you new interest, faith, delight, in the person of whom he spoke? On the contrary, does he not somehow manage to chill what you have?"

"I cannot say that he talks of his friends with the warm effusion of a woman," answered Mr. Bergen, sarcastically.

"But only with the cold malice of a man," retorted Mrs. Bergen. "There! a truce! He shall come, if only to prove what I have said. Next, I want to invite Mrs. Lyte and Astra."

"Very well."

"And Mr. Islay, and Judge and Mrs. Morris, and—"

"You have seven already," interrupted Mr. Bergen, "making ten with ourselves; which I hold to be the magic number for a dinner party. If you want to invite anybody else, better wait till another time."

Mrs. Bergan was wise enough to be the bearer of her own invitation to Mrs. Lyte; else it would scarcely have been accepted. The latter had lost the taste for society with the habit of it; nothing short of the personal solicitation of her old friend, now asking it as a favor to herself, and now urging it for Astra's sake, would have induced her to give up, even for a few hours, the seclusion that had slowly been transformed, for her as for most invalids, from a grievous necessity into a calm pleasantness.

Thus far, Mrs. Bergan was successful. But she missed seeing either Astra or Bergan; both happened to be out, on their respective ways. As regarded the former, it did not much matter; but she was sorry not to see Bergan, and utter the few graceful words of apology for the past, as well as of promise for the future, wherewith she had intended to preface her invitation to dinner, and inaugurate her new policy. As it was, she could only leave a pencilled note of invitation on his desk, and reserve her explanation for a personal interview. Then she went back to the studio, where she admired everything cordially, and with wonderful impartiality. Carice, meanwhile, was hanging over the winged cherub, with a deep, silent delight that went to Mrs. Lyte's heart.

"You will take such pleasure in meeting her again!" she said to Astra, when she came in, a few moments after the visitors had gone. "She is just the friend that you need."

"I am not so sure about that!" returned Astra willingly. "I sometimes catch a glimpse of her at church; and she looks a great deal too soft and dainty and delicate for a friend. If I were a Roman Catholic, I might set her up in a corner, and worship her as a madonna, or a saint. But, being a Protestant, I really don't see that I have any need of her,—or she, indeed, of me!"

Mrs. Lyte shook her head in mild reproof. "You do say such strange things, Astra," said she, "things so liable to be misunderstood."

"*You* do not misunderstand them, mamma," returned Astra, fondly.

"No, but Mr. Arling might."

Astra turned, in surprise, and met Bergan's quiet smile. He had come in just behind her, and had heard almost the whole.

"I think not," said Astra, coolly. "Mr. Arling is pretty well used to my ways, by this time. We were speaking," she continued, "of that ineffable combination of snow and sunshine, lily and rose, saint and angel, known among mortals by the name of Carice Bergan. Can you even imagine being on familiar terms with her? Or would you if you could? Does she not seem fitter for a pedestal or a shrine,—some place a little above, or remote from, life's ordinary round?"

"She does, indeed," replied Bergan, earnestly. "There is a half-unearthly purity about her, that keeps even one's thoughts at a reverent distance. Snow and sunshine!—yes, she has something of both, a kind of soft, white chill, interfused with a rich brightness, half-golden, half-roseate;—but it is impossible to put the idea into words!"

And Bergan turned, musingly, toward his office door.

Astra looked after him, for a moment, and then glanced smilingly at her mother.

"Fortunately, there are such things as household divinities," said she.

"Eh?" said Mrs. Lyte, wonderingly.

But Astra did not explain.

XIII.

DINNER-TABLE TALK.

LATE wisdom is apt to taste of the flower of folly whence it is distilled. So, at least, thought Mrs.

Bergan, when, months afterward, she looked back upon her dinner-party, and seemed to see in it the beginning of trouble. But it is probable that nothing which she could have done, or left undone, would have availed to alter the natural, irresistible course of events. At the most, she may have hastened its current a little. Her dinner-party only furnished a convenient point of meeting for lives inevitably tending toward each other, for influences long converging, and certain to meet at last, in clash or harmony. Without it, there must needs have been a swift birth of friendship between Carice and Astra, at their next meeting; which meeting could not have been much longer deferred. Without it, Doctor Remy would assiduously have spun his web for self-advantage, fastening his threads indifferently to whatever or whomsoever seemed to promise the best support, and quickly unfastening them whenever a prop failed him. Without it, the hearts of Bergan and Carice would sooner or later have inclined toward each other, by reason of an instinct truer and surer than maternal foresight or forestalling.

The dinner was, *per se*, a success. The table was elegant with glass, silver, and flowers; the viands were the creation of one of those round, greasy Africanesses, who are born to the gridiron not less indubitably than a poet to the lyre; and white-haired old Sancho waited with a blending of obsequiousness and pomposity, wonderful to behold. There

were neither culinary failures to harrow the soul of the hostess, nor glass-fractures or sauce-spillings to disconcert her guests.

The conversation was bright, easy, and desultory, as well as interlocutory and general by turns, as dinner-table talk should be. Only once, and that quite at the last, did it take a graver turn than was well suited to the occasion, or seem to stir any ill-feeling. In a pause of the more general conversation, Doctor Remy was heard saying to Carice, who sat next him ;—

“You are fortunate in being able to believe so implicitly, without ampler proof.”

“Do you think the proof insufficient, then?” asked Carice, with a little look of wonder in her blue eyes.

“To some minds,” answered Doctor Remy, evasively.

“Perhaps,” interposed Mr. Islay, whose ears had been open for some moments toward this conversation,—“perhaps such minds find the proof insufficient only because they have not yet been able to look at it in the right light.”

“What light do you mean?” asked Doctor Remy, a little doubtfully.

“The light of a renewed heart and an obedient life. No man apprehends the truths of Christianity clearly, nor believes them with a belief that is worth anything, until he feels his own personal need of them. When that time comes, he catches hold of them, without proof, as it were,—or, at least, without other proof than their felt adaptation to that intense need,—just as a man who is hungry and thirsty accepts convenient food without troubling himself about its chemical analysis. Then, holding them fast, and feeling how perfectly they meet his wants, what strength and satisfaction they give to his mind, and what symmetry and dignity they impart to his life, he begins to look back over the long line of prophecy and testimony for proof, and finds it ample. Men are prone to forget, Dr. Remy,

that the natural order—as we see in children—is through the heart to the intellect, not through the intellect to the heart.”

“But,” objected Doctor Remy, “if a man is not sensible of any such personal need, how is he to be made to feel it?”

“Who can tell?” responded Mr. Islay, solemnly. “If the eye sees no comeliness in Christ, to desire Him, if the heart feels no void which craves His fulness, no pang which needs His healing, who can tell when the one will be opened, the other emptied or smitten? ‘The wind bloweth where it listeth.’ But I *can* tell you, Doctor Remy, how a man can postpone the time of conviction to the last moment, perhaps to the very end.”

“Indeed,” answered Doctor Remy, lifting his eyebrows. “May I ask for the formula?”

“Simply by leading a life of deliberate, habitual sin and selfishness. There is nothing like sin for blinding the eyes, and misleading the judgment, in regard to spiritual things. Indeed, if I desired to shake my own faith in Christ to the very centre, I know no way in which I could do it so surely as by committing some dreadful crime—murder, for instance. All my views of life and death, earth and heaven, would at once become distorted and confused, just as all my thoughts and aims would immediately take a new direction.”

Mr. Islay being on the same side of the table as his interlocutor, could not observe the latter’s sudden change of countenance; but Bergan, sitting opposite, was surprised to see the doctor’s face darken with some powerful emotion, while he shot a furtive, suspicious glance at the speaker. Yet his voice, when he spoke, was studiously low and even, so much so that its latent venom was unnoticed by the majority of the party.

“Inasmuch,” said he, “as Mr. Islay is able to speak so intelligently of religious faith, because of his thorough ac-

quaintance therewith, so, doubtless, his remarks upon crime and its effects are the outcome of his own personal experience."

Bergan colored with indignation, and was about to say something in sharp rebuke of the covert insult; but Mr. Islay stopped him by a look, and a slight, yet decided gesture.

"You are thinking, doubtless," said he, mildly, turning to Dr. Remy, "of the deep truth that he who would teach successfully, must know something of his subject by experience as well as theory. A clergyman certainly does find in his own heart both the suggestion and the proof of the truths which he seeks to enforce upon others. Herein lies his fitness for his office. Out of seeming weakness comes real strength. Feeling, or having felt, in his own person, the power both of sin and of redeeming love, he can the better set forth the hatefulness of the one, and the efficacy of the other."

There was a slight pause; then, Mrs. Bergan made haste to break the silence, and to do it in such a manner as to induce a speedy change of subject. And Dr. Remy, after a brief moodiness, which seemed to indicate some lingering effect of the preceding discussion, suddenly unbent his brow, and threw himself into the new theme with animation, to the immediate enlivenment of the party, and the gradual extinction of his hostess's resentment. She acknowledged to herself that he could be exceedingly agreeable, when it pleased him. If he would but spice his conversation a little less freely with sarcasm!

And then she gave the signal for the ladies to leave the table.

As has been already hinted, the more immediate and visible result of the dinner-party at Oakstead, was a swift budding and blossoming of friendship between Carice and Astra. Despite the playful disclaimer of the latter, when the probability of such a consummation had been men-

tioned by her mother, no sooner did the two girls meet face to face, the gray eyes and the blue ones looking straight into each other's depths, than there was an instant, unlooked-for revival of their childish affection and confidence; quickly informed by a deeper sympathy and fuller comprehension. It was much like sisters—unavoidably separated for years, but in whom the instinct of kinship cannot be lost—that they sat talking together, in a twilight corner of the parlor, until the gentlemen came from the dining-room. Not only were there pleasant childhood memories to recall, but the life-story of each was to be brought fairly up to the present time, for the enlightenment of the other. Astra's was the more eventful; it embraced all her art-education and life, with its toils, pleasures, difficulties, ambitions, and disappointments. Carice's was more like that of a flower; she had lived and grown in the home-precinct, she had fed on sunshine and dew, sweet and right thoughts had been as natural to her as perfume to a rose, she had made a little space very delightful with her beauty and her sweetness; and that was all. Each felt a very genuine admiration for the other;—Carice bent loyally before Astra's crown of genius; Astra held her breath, half in awe, half in tenderness, before the aureola that she saw encircling the fair head of Carice. As for the "chill" of which she had spoken to Bergan, she had ceased to think of it. Carice's affections were warm enough, she saw, when they were reached. Yet there was something about her too, which she would still have been forced to call chill, for want of a better word,—that indefinable quality which is inseparable from anything at once white and pure,—a pearl, a star, or the white wing of a dove.

As a natural consequence of this friendship, Carice came often to Astra's studio. Not infrequently she met Bergan there. Remembering Miss Ferrar's statement, and giving it more credit than she was really aware of, she wondered, sometimes, that she could detect no sign of a secret, or tacit,

understanding between him and Astra. Their manner to each other was most frank and kind, but it seemed totally devoid of any lover-like quality. She finally settled it in her mind that no engagement existed as yet; but she also decided that, inasmuch as they were admirably fitted for each other, it was sure to come, in good time. Nothing better, she thought, in her innocent heart, could well be devised for either.

Astra, meanwhile was watching Bergan and Carice with as warm an interest, and a far more penetrating glance; and often she smiled to herself over the discoveries that she made. To her, they appeared to be drifting as surely, if unconsciously, down the smooth, gliding current of love, as could be desired. She was glad to have it so. She believed them to be true counterparts, needing each to be completed by the other. Bergan had strength, nobleness, enthusiasm; Carice had sweetness, purity, repose; how beautiful and fit the union, how symmetrical the result! There was a genuine artistic joy in the thought.

And then, all at once, she forgot to watch them. Suddenly, or gradually, she knew not which, a magical change had been wrought in her surroundings; old things had vanished, all things had become new. A new sky, a new earth,—stars and cloud-shapes of bewitching vagueness and softness,—scenery of wondrous coloring and surpassing loveliness,—lights that were tenderer than any shadows, and shadows that were only subdued lights;—of what were these things the signs? Had she also been drifting, and whither?

PART THIRD.

THE IN-GATHERING.

I.

UNFOLDINGS.

SPRING was abroad in the land. No one could tell just when she had stolen into the woods and gardens, and begun her pleasant labors, but there was no question about the fact of her presence and industry. Everywhere, there were the tender green of newborn foliage, and the varied odors of opening buds and blossoms. The new leaves of the ilex trees had quietly pushed off the old ones. The hedges were thick-sown with the white stars of the Cherokee rose. The passion-vine trailed its purple garments along the fences. Houstonias spread a soft blue haze over the grass. Wild plum and cherry trees flung drifts of fragrant snow along the road side. The air was faint with perfume from the ivory censers of the magnolia, swinging dreamily overhead. Wherever a vine could cling and climb, there was a seemingly miraculous outburst of foliage and flowers ; every dry stick and stem became a leafy thyrus, every crumbling stump a green and garlanded altar.

Mrs. Lyte's great, irregular thicket of a garden was quick to feel the genial influence, and to twine and twist itself into a denser tangle than ever. Rose bushes laughed the virtue of economy to scorn, with their perfumed affluence of pink and crimson and yellow. Pomegranates burst

into scarlet flames; mimosas tossed aloft feathery balls of many hues. Jessamines and honeysuckles, holding up vases of gold, to catch every sunbeam, ran hither and thither at their own sweet will. So did tiny green lizards, with scarlet throats, and swift chameleons, with curious intelligent eyes. The air was tuneful with the flight and song of bees and humming-birds, cooing doves, and shining-winged spindles. Manifold, in truth, were the garden's delights: varied sound and color and perfume, cheerful radiance and gentle gloom, unobtrusive companionship and soft seclusion, were all to be found within its pleasant compass.

And, as the days grew long and warm with the Spring's advance, Bergan now and then, growing weary of the confinement and monotony of his office, took his Blackstone, or Kent, or whatever might be the legal authority under examination, and gave himself the refreshment of an hour's reading, in one of the garden's shady, sequestered nooks. Doing this, one sultry afternoon in May, the drowsy influence of the atmosphere, and the soothing murmurousness of the insects' song, soon proved too potent for the logical connection of the learned legal thesis; there were unaccountable gaps between fact and deduction; and, going back to pick up the broken thread, Bergan lost it altogether. Sleep had stolen upon him through the dusky foliage, and she held him fast until the latest sunbeam, through a convenient aperture in the verdant walls, laid its light finger on his eyelids.

Waking suddenly, but completely, hushed voices, proceeding from a neighboring thicket, met his ear.

"Impossible, Felix."

"But, Astra,—"

Had there been danger in those low, earnest accents, Bergan could scarcely have started up more quickly and cautiously, nor have fled from them faster. As he expected and desired, the low boughs closing and rustling behind him, made what followed inaudible. He was loath

to hear another word. He felt almost guilty for having heard so much. Those subdued, confidential tones, those quietly spoken Christian names, had, of themselves, been a startling revelation. For, notwithstanding her frank, easy, affable deportment toward those who came within her sphere, Astra Lyte knew well how to hedge herself round with a maidenly dignity that kept familiarity at a distance. She was not the kind of girl whose Christian name finds its way easily to unaccustomed lips. Despite his own residence, for a considerable time, under the same roof, and the frank and friendly intercourse which had grown out of it, —despite, too, the fact that Mrs. Lyte often called him her son, and Cathie was wont to spring to his arms as to those of a brother,—it had never occurred to himself to call her anything less formal than “Miss Lyte.” Nor would it have done to Dr. Remy, he felt sure, without the sufficient warrant of a close and tender relation. This premise being established, the conclusion that such a relation existed was unavoidable.

And, looking back over the events of the past few weeks, Bergan was amazed to see with what an amount of corroboratory evidence he was unexpectedly furnished. Not only did numberless glances, tones, and actions, bearing directly upon the case, start suddenly into view, but, just as the landscape through which one passes presents new outlines, new features, and a new sentiment, in a backward survey, so these things assumed new faces and a new meaning, in his review of them. Once or twice, of late, it had occurred to him that Astra was scarcely at her ease, in Dr. Remy’s presence ; he now understood that this constraint came of affection, fearful of betraying itself, and not, as he had imagined, of some newborn distrust or dislike. Anterior to this, he had observed that the doctor’s visits to Miss Lyte’s studio were much more frequent than formerly, and that he was making an obvious enough attempt to commend himself to her favor by a more cordial and con-

stant interest in her work, as well as by exercising a more careful circumspection over his conversation. His cynicism vanished, or veiled itself, before the rich glow of her enthusiasm. His satire spared her generous ambition. His scepticism, though not less frank, was less hostile and inveterate; and often it resolved itself into a kind of weary and wistful sadness, as if it were less a choice than a misfortune, and would gladly exchange itself for something better, if it only knew how. At such times, Bergan himself was sensible of a singular charm in his conversation, a kind of autumn-night splendor; chill, lustrous moonlight, mystical shadow, and vague mournfulness, blending into one, irresistible fascination. No doubt, Astra had been made to feel it still more keenly; no doubt, too, she had been led to believe that whatever was amiss in the doctor's beliefs would yield readily to her influence,—that he would prove scarcely less plastic in her hands than the clay where-with she was wont to deal so cunningly.

Yet Bergan could not help wondering a little at the doctor's ready success. Astra's genius, he thought, should have saved her from any hasty bestowal of her affections. He did not know that, in this regard, a woman of genius differs little from the most commonplace of her sisters. She gives her affections as trustfully, and flings herself away as freely, as the silliest of them all.

Having gotten to this point in his meditations, and also to the middle of the open field, back of the garden, Bergan could not help turning and looking toward the thicket, the neighborhood of which he had so hastily quitted. His face grew troubled and anxious, as he gazed. Was Doctor Remy anywise worthy of the heart that he had won? Bergan shook his head ruefully, as he asked himself this question. Without intent or wish of his own—in spite, even, of some strenuous efforts to the contrary—a deep distrust of the doctor had rooted itself in his mind. Though it gave but scanty justification of itself to his intellect, and was not al-

lowed to show itself in his actions; though, now and then, he made a sturdy effort to uproot it, and cast it out, as an ungenerous return for kindness, or something that looked like it; it, nevertheless, kept its ground, and quietly strengthened itself there. It did not fail, now, to thrust itself into view, as a partial answer to his question. The bright spring landscape, with its crowded leaf and bloom, and its rich promise of fruit, seemed to darken with a shadow from Astra's future, as thus revealed to him. Must the promise of seed-time and harvest fail, then, only in the moral world?

Though Bergan, driven by a nice sense of honor, had fled so precipitately from the voices and the neighborhood of the lovers, there is no reason why the reader may not return thither, and see what is to be learned from their conversation.

"I cannot think it right," said Astra, "to leave mother in ignorance any longer."

"Do you think, then," asked Doctor Remy, reproachfully, "that I would ask you to do anything wrong?"

Astra hesitated for a moment. Perhaps it then and there occurred to her, for the first time, that the doctor's standard of right was likely to differ from her own, in the same ratio as his religious faith.

Doctor Remy did not wait for the tardy answer. Putting his arm round Astra, he drew her head on to his shoulder. The movement might have been prompted by tenderness; none the less, it had the effect to take his face out of her line of vision.

"All my life long, Astra," said he, in a deep, moved tone—(it is often easier to put a desired note into the voice, than a corresponding expression into the face)—"all my life long, I have had a strange desire to be trusted,—trusted implicitly. Faith without sight—blind, unquestioning faith—is to me one of the most beautiful as well as desirable things on earth; all the more so, perhaps, that it is not

given to me to feel it. But it has always been my dream, my hope, to inspire it. In my ideal picture of the woman whom I should love, it was always her consummate, irresistible charm. Must I now make up my mind to do without it?"

Astra was touched. "If it did not seem to be wrong!" she exclaimed.

The doctor shook his head. "*That* is not trust," said he, "at least, not the trust that I mean. Who can so order circumstances that they shall never seem to condemn him? But the faith of which I speak, having once assured itself of the integrity of its beloved, never again admits it to be an open question."

Astra was silent. The doctor heaved a heavy sigh. "I see that I am not to realize my ideal," said he. "Well, it cannot be helped. I will give you the explanation that you need. Perhaps, being satisfied, in this instance, that I have a good reason for what I do, you will be able to trust me hereafter."

"I will, indeed I will!" exclaimed Astra, eagerly.

"The worst of it is," pursued the doctor, "that you compel me to betray a trust—your mother's trust."

Astra's cheek flushed. She had been miserable at the idea of keeping anything from her mother; was she, then, the one really excluded from confidence?

"Stay," said she, proudly, "I do not wish to hear anything that my mother desires to conceal from me."

"Then," replied the doctor, "it is impossible for me to explain why our engagement must not be made known, at present, to your mother."

Astra looked bewildered, as well she might, at this apparently inscrutable complication.

Doctor Remy seemed to take pity on her perplexity. "Listen, dear," said he, "and you will soon understand. Your mother consulted me professionally, a fortnight since."

Astra's cheek grew white with sudden fear. "What is it?" she gasped.

"There is no immediate danger," said the doctor, "and may not be, for years, with due precautions. But there is a tendency to heart disease; and it is imperative, just now, that she should not be agitated. And this, Astra, is the reason why she must not hear of our engagement, for some time to come."

Astra looked down thoughtfully. "I think you are mistaken," said she. "I believe it would be a relief to her to know that my future is in such good hands."

"Doubtless, that would be the ultimate effect," replied Doctor Remy; "but there would be emotional excitement, at first, more than is good for her;—so much that I, as a physician, am bound to forbid it."

Astra could not but admit that the prohibition was just. Mrs. Lyte had seemed very fragile and feeble, of late. Astra had urged that application to Doctor Remy which, it now appeared, her mother had made, but in regard to the results of which she had chosen to keep silence,—from a loving wish, probably, to save her daughter from unavailing anxiety. Astra's heart swelled at the thought.

"Are you *sure*," she asked, "that there is no immediate danger?"

"As sure as one can be, in such cases—*if* she is kept quiet."

"And is there any probability that the disease may be eventually cured?"

"There is a possibility,—with the same indispensable condition."

Doctor Remy waited for a moment, in order that Astra might be duly impressed with this answer; then, he asked with a kind of proud humility;—

"Have I justified myself, in this matter?"

"Forgive me," said Astra, penitently. "Of course I never really distrusted your motives; I only fancied

that my duty to my mother could not be affected by them."

"You see," suggested Doctor Remy, "how easy it is to be misled by appearances, even with the best intentions. The faith, of which I used to dream, would never have fallen into that error."

"I will try to have it, hereafter," said Astra.

"And yet," returned Doctor Remy, "you will doubtless insist upon a further explanation of the reason why I do not wish our engagement to be known to the outside world."

"Indeed, I shall not," returned Astra, glad of an opportunity of proving that she was neither so distrustful, nor so curious, as he believed. "Of course, the outside world must wait till mother is informed; she has the right to the first telling. If you have any other reason for keeping the matter secret, I do not seek to know it."

Could Astra have seen the look of triumph in Doctor Remy's face, she would have been startled. But he only said, quietly,—

"Thank you for so much trust." And, after a moment, he added,—“As you say, it is your mother's right to know first. Of course, then, you will not indulge in any confidences to intimate friends.”

"Certainly not," said Astra, a little surprised. "Indeed, I have none,—except, perhaps, Carice Bergan."

"I would not mention it, even to her," said the doctor.

"I do not intend to," replied Astra, decidedly. "But I must go in; mother will miss me."

II.

THE FOUNDATIONS FAIL.

A STRA'S light form being quickly lost behind the intervening foliage, Doctor Remy turned slowly and meditatively toward his office; which, inasmuch as it had been built for the use and behoof of the late Doctor Lyte, possessed its own door of convenient communication with the garden.

Given opportunity, social equality, and a fine, unremitting tact, and it would seem that any man can marry any woman, whose affections are free. Else, it would be hard to understand how Doctor Remy could have found his way into the heart of Astra Lyte; unless indeed, as is frequently the case, their very dissimilarity should have constituted a principle of attraction; character has its own laws of effective contrast. Astra was enthusiastic, generous, affectionate, with strong religious instincts and aspirations; Doctor Remy was cold, selfish, austere, without reverential sentiment, and, in matters of faith, an utter sceptic. But these traits need not be supposed to have exhibited themselves to Astra in their naked unloveliness. To her imagination, doubtless, they took the fairer form of a calm temperament, and great force and firmness of character, allied to a keen and critical intellect; which last must needs be allowed to take its own appropriate time and road to belief (except as it seemed willing to owe something to her loving guidance). And Astra was of the age and character which are most prone to fall down and worship human intellect; failing, as yet, to understand that it is, in itself, of the earth earthy, and really noble and admirable

only as it is enlightened by the spirit of God. She was dazzled and fascinated by the extent and variety of Doctor Remy's attainments, and the range and freedom of his ideas. To talk with him was like drawing the curtain and opening wide the window on a wintry evening, admitting free, frosty air, and giving a far outlook over bleak, white hills and leafless forests. Nor did it alarm her that the air was much too fresh and chill to be breathed long with comfort or safety, and the landscape drearily bare and skeleton-like, since the doctor was always ready, at her slightest sign, to drop window and curtain, and turn back with her to warmer precincts and gentler themes.

And so, it had come to pass that, as Doctor Remy walked up the shady garden walk, he had good reason to congratulate himself upon the success, thus far, of his plans. Not only was Astra won, but she had consented to keep silence about the wooing, for awhile. Thus he was saved from the awkwardness of having to account to Mrs. Lyte for his unwillingness to have the engagement made public. It would be difficult to invent a reason likely to commend itself to her judgment; yet it was out of the question to give her the real one,—namely, his reasonable doubt whether he should be altogether acceptable to Major Bergan as the future husband of that gentleman's heiress, and so, in some sense, as his heir; and his consequent fear lest the will in her favor should be set aside. Such a confession might give a mercenary tinge to his suit, in Mrs. Lyte's eyes, which he wisely deprecated. So far as he knew, neither she nor her daughter had ever heard of the Major's declaration of his gracious intentions toward the latter; or, if they had, they regarded it only as a meaningless ebullition of his rage at Bergan Arling. Such, in truth, would the doctor himself have thought it, except for certain later inquiries respecting Miss Lyte, put to himself by the Major; which seemed to show that the matter had not escaped his memory. Besides, in consideration of the Ma-

major's bitter resentment toward his brother and nephew,—extending, apparently, to everybody connected with either,—no more eligible heir to the Bergan estate was to be found, than Astra Lyte. If the Major had made his will, as he threatened, there was no one, in the whole Bergan connection, with so strong a claim upon his favorable consideration.

Here the doctor paused, for a moment, in his slow walk. "If!" he muttered, peevishly. "To think that the whole thing turns on a miserable 'if!' I must contrive some way of finding out whether that will—or any will—was ever made. There must be no defective nor missing links in this chain, nothing to invite the meddling of the cursed fate which has followed me so long. The Major must not be permitted to die, one of these days,—by the interposition of Providence and delirium tremens, or something vastly like it,—and leave me with an abortive plan and a portionless *fiancée*. To be sure, I should not be long in getting rid of the latter, but there would be no help for the former."

His soliloquy had brought him to his office door. Suddenly bethinking himself, then, that a certain patient had been overlooked in the catalogue of the day's duties, he called for his horse, and set out to make good the omission.

His road led past the Bergan estate. As he was galloping swiftly onward, absorbed in his own reflections, he heard an energetic "Halloo!" Pulling up his horse, and looking back, he beheld Major Bergan leaning over a small gate, which opened into the fields near the quarter.

"Are you deaf?" was his angry salutation, duly emphasized with an oath. "Here I've been hollering after you, till I'm black in the face. I wish I had saved myself the trouble!"

"All the fault of my horse's hoofs," replied the doctor, good-humoredly, as he turned his horse toward the gate;

"they made such a clatter under me that I could not well hear anything else. How can I serve you?"

Major Bergan hesitated. Apparently his business did not come readily to his lips.

"Perhaps you are on your way to a patient," he finally observed, as if he would be well enough suited to find an excuse for not broaching it at all.

His reluctance only stimulated the doctor's curiosity. "The case is not urgent," said he, carelessly; "by and by, or even to-morrow morning, will do just as well. There is no reason why I should not be entirely at your service—as I am."

"Come in, then," returned the Major, in a tone that was far from gracious; but swinging open the gate, nevertheless, for Doctor Remy's admission.

The latter dismounted, led his horse through, and slipping the bridle over his arm, walked by the Major's side to the cottage. On the way, the latter vouchsafed a brief explanation of his wishes.

"I've been thinking a good deal of the advice that you gave me awhile ago," said he, "and—and—I've concluded to make my will. So, seeing you riding by, just as my mind was full of the subject, it occurred to me that I might as well call you in, and have the thing over with."

"And a very sensible decision," returned Doctor Remy, as quietly as if he were not filled with unexpected delight that the information which he had hoped to gain only at cost of some deep and difficult scheming, was thus placed within easy reach. "I only wonder that you have not done it before."

"I don't see why I should," replied Major Bergan, sharply; "I've always been strong and hearty,—what had I to do with making wills? And, now that I think of it, what have I to do with it now? I'm not in a decline yet, by any means."

"So much the better for your work," replied Doctor

Remy, composedly. "Deathbed wills are often contested. No one will question your soundness of mind, at present."

"I should think not," said the Major, decidedly. "If he did, he wouldn't be apt to doubt the soundness of my sinews,—I'd horsewhip him into instant conviction."

"Are you provided with witnesses?" asked the Doctor, when the Major's chuckle had subsided.

"Witnesses? How many does it want?"

"Two are necessary."

The Major mused for a moment. "I can have them here by the time they are needed," said he. "My new overseer at Number Two will do for one, and I'll send for Proverb Dick for the other. Step into the cottage, and make yourself at home for a moment, while I see about it."

Doctor Remy flung himself into the first chair that presented itself, and sank into a fit of thought. A vague disquietude oppressed him, notwithstanding that events seemed to be shaping themselves so much in accordance with his wishes. He believed himself to be on the eve of victory, or at least of a certain measure of present success which would insure victory; but both religion and philosophy, he knew, were agreed in representing human expectations as of the nature of the flower of the field, in various danger from the frost, the knife, and the uprooting wind. To this general testimony he could add the special confirmation of his own experience. Like most men, Doctor Remy had the sobering privilege of looking back upon a career of which the successes were few, and the failures and disappointments many. The track of his earthly pilgrimage, thus far, he bitterly thought, was tolerably well strewn with wrecks and abortions.

A better man, trying to spell out the meaning and tendency of his life by the aid of a higher inspiration, might have found some comfort in the review, nevertheless. He might have discovered some evidences of harmony and

design amid seeming discord and confusion, some solid foundations showing underneath abortive ruins, some steady inward growth of patience and strength and hope, in lieu of an outward harvest of earthly possessions. He might have discerned, with awe and humility, that sometimes he had builded better than he knew, because building in accordance with a certain overruling design, of which he now first began to catch faint and partial glimpses. But such consolation was not allowed to Doctor Remy. In his past, all was incomplete, confused, and unsatisfactory. He had not gained what he sought, and nothing better had come to him through its loss. For many years of time, and an uncommon measure of talent, he had scarce anything to show of what he considered life's highest prizes—wealth, position, influence. He set himself seriously to discover why. And, for one moment, he, too, had a chill perception of a certain unity and sequence in the *débris* left behind him, unperceived before; which seemed to show that, though he had served his own ends but poorly, he had none the less helped to forward some extended scheme, whereof he had known nothing at the time, and could now discern only the most fragmentary outline. But Doctor Remy quickly shook himself free of this notion, with a smile at his own absurdity.

Why, then, he asked himself, had he failed? Because of his mistakes, no doubt. Let every man bear the blame of his own acts, and not try to throw it off on his neighbors, or that convenient scapegoat, Providence. Looking back, he could discern many a point (and notably one), where he had committed a grave error. But his mistakes had been his instructors, nevertheless. He had gained from them knowledge that should stand him in good stead yet. To his former qualities of boldness, energy, perseverance, and skill, he now added the experience that could use them to better effect. It would be strange, indeed, if he could not henceforth command success.

He had just reached this conclusion when Major Bergan joined him. Ample provision of lights, paper, pens, and ink, being then placed upon the table, together with the inevitable brandy bottle, the two gentlemen sat down opposite each other, and Doctor Remy began his task of drawing up the will. He first wrote the usual legal preamble, in a clear, rapid hand, and read it aloud for Major Bergan's approval. Some small legacies followed, taken down nearly *verbatim* from the Major's dictation. Doctor Remy then waited, for some moments, with his pen suspended over the paper, while the Major seemed trying vainly to arrange his thoughts.

"I don't quite know how to word the next," said he, at length, "you must put it into shape yourself. I hold a mortgage of the place where Catherine Lyte lives; and I want it cancelled, at my death, in her favor, or, if she does not survive me, in favor of her daughter Astra."

"You surprise me," remarked Doctor Remy, as he began to write; "I have always understood that the place was free from incumbrance."

"You understood wrong, then," replied Major Bergan. "Though, for anything that I know, Catherine Lyte may think so herself. You see, Harvey got into difficulties eight or nine years ago, and I lent him money, and took a mortgage on the place. He kept the interest paid up until his death; and since then, nothing has been said to me about either interest or principal; from which I concluded that Catherine did not know of the fact. And as I felt sorry for her, I decided to say nothing about it myself, as long as I was not in need of the money, nor likely to be. But it will not do her any harm to know, after I am dead, that I have been kinder to her than she knew of."

Doctor Remy looked up with a smile. "I suspect," said he, "that it would not be well for her to offend you."

"I don't know about that," replied Major Bergan, complacently. "She did offend me, when she took my nephew

in; and I came pretty near foreclosing then. But Maumer Rue convinced me that she could not afford to refuse a good offer for her rooms; and moreover, as Harry only had his office there, and took his meals at the hotel, she need not have much more to do with him than I did, if she did not choose."

Doctor Remy did not think it necessary to enlighten the Major in regard to Bergan's familiarity with the family of Mrs. Lyte, since such a disclosure must needs militate directly against his own ends. He silently put the Major's wish into correct legal phrase and form, and then lifted his head with the question;—

"What next?"

Major Bergan's face grew grave and troubled. Thus far, it had been easy work, merely giving away what he did not care for, and should not miss. But now that the bulk of his property, real and personal, was to come in question, he groaned inwardly at the necessity of bequeathing it to any one. Did it not represent all the hopes, energies, labors and results of his whole life? What a naked, shivering, miserable soul he would be without it! He had a feeling that he should never be quite certain of his own identity, in eternity, without the houses and the lands, the negroes and the gold, for which he had lived in time.

"Well!" said Dr. Remy, by way of reminding him that he was still waiting.

The Major frowned; nevertheless, after another moment, he resumed his dictation.

"I give and bequeath," said he, slowly, "my house known as Bergan Hall, with all the lands thereto pertaining, including the rice-plantation known as 'Number Two;' also my three houses in the town of Berganton; also my block in the city of Savannah; also my negroes, horses, mills, and plantation implements; also, my household furniture and other personal property, including all bonds, mort-

gages, moneys, and all other property whereof I die possessed, to ——”

Doctor Remy had written down the items of this comprehensive inventory with a delight that he could scarcely keep from shining out in his face; and he now held his pen over the paper, while the Major paused, in real enjoyment of so timely an opportunity for pleasurable recapitulation and anticipation. The pause being a long one, however, he finally raised his eyes to the rugged features opposite, and saw that they were tremulous with emotion. Words, too, soon began to break from the Major's lips, according to the habit which had grown upon him in his solitude;—he had forgotten for the time, that he was not alone.

“He is the natural heir, as Maumer Rue insists,” he muttered, “and the only one justified by the old family precedents. But,” he went on, as Dr. Remy began to tremble, vicariously, for Astra's prospects, “he left me without so much as saying ‘good bye;’ he did just what he knew I was most bitterly opposed to; and he has never come near me since. No, he shall not have it!—he *never* shall have it, in spite of Maumer Rue's prophecies—I'll take care of that!”

And he began to repeat slowly, “bonds, mortgages, moneys, and all other property whereof I die possessed, to —to—”

Again he paused.

“Why can't he say ‘to Astra Lyte,’ and done with it?” thought Dr. Remy, impatiently, as he suddenly checked his pen in the midst of the first curve of the letter A.

The Major made another effort;—“To my niece, Carice Bergan,” he concluded, with a sigh.

Doctor Remy's face fell so suddenly, that it attracted the Major's attention.

“Well! what is the matter now?” he demanded, sharply.

Doctor Remy could not immediately answer. His mind

was in a whirl of confusion, disappointment, and anxiety. Mechanically, he put his hand to his brow; and the gesture helped him to a plausible explanation.

"A sudden pain," said he, in a low, shaken voice; "I have felt it several times of late. Wait a minute, it will soon be over."

And covering his eyes with his hands, he addressed himself at once to the task of answering the difficult question;—

What is to be done now?

It was well for him that he was accustomed to think rapidly and clearly, in the immediate presence of danger, that he was tenacious of purpose too, and that his instinct, in the midst of overthrow and ruin, was to commence at once to rebuild. Yet, for some moments, not an available suggestion presented itself, not a shadow of help for the exigency that had so unexpectedly arisen.

"Then, suddenly, a thought came to him, and with it, a gleam of hope. He took his hands from his eyes, and looked the Major gravely in the face.

"Before we go any farther," said he, "I feel bound in honor to make a confession. If I had supposed that writing your will was going to put me in such an awkward position, I should certainly have desired you to look elsewhere for a lawyer. However, it cannot be helped now. Well, the truth is"—he stopped for a moment, as if to overcome an excessive reluctance,—“the truth is, I have long admired your niece; and now, as my practice is steadily increasing, and I think I could take care of a wife, I had made up my mind to ask permission to pay her my addresses.”

Major Bergan uttered a prolonged "Whew!" and settled himself back in his chair. "That alters the case, certainly," said he, after a brief consideration of this new phase of the matter.

"I am glad to hear it," exclaimed Dr. Remy, eagerly.

"Pray—if it is not too selfish in me to ask it—pray give Bergan Hall to the next most eligible claimant, and leave me Miss Carice."

The Major raised his eyebrows, and leaning forward, fixed his eyes on Doctor Remy, as if he had found a new and interesting subject of study.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, gravely, "that you would rather have Carice without Bergan Hall than with it?"

"Decidedly," replied Doctor Remy. "I prefer an equal match to an unequal one. I prefer to be credited with honorable motives, rather than mercenary ones. I don't want to be a pensioner on my wife's bounty. It is doubtful if I could ever make up my mind to address the heiress of Bergan Hall. And thus, you see, if you persist in making Miss Bergan your legatee, you are playing the mischief with my hopes and plans."

Major Bergan continued to stare, thoughtfully, at the doctor. He was beginning rather to like this disinterested suitor.

"Have you any reason to think that Carice favors you?" he asked, finally.

Doctor Remy hesitated. "I really don't know how to answer that question. If I should say 'yes,' in view of the 'trifles light as air,' from which I have ventured to draw some slight encouragement, I should seem, even to myself, to be a conceited ass; and yet, if you would only be good enough not to throw Bergan Hall into the scale against me, I should not be absolutely without hope."

Major Bergan gave a short laugh. "Who will know," he asked, "that Carice is to have Bergan Hall? I expect you to keep my counsel in this matter. That is why I asked you to do the business. I had an idea that you were closer-mouthed, both by nature and training, than those lawyers in Berganton."

"I shall know it," replied Doctor Remy, virtuously,

answering the Major's question, and taking no notice of the compliment which followed it. "And I shall know, too, that the heiress of Bergan Hall, if she were aware of her position, might reasonably expect to find a better match than a mere country physician."

"On my soul," exclaimed the Major, heartily, "I think she might 'go farther and fare worse!' Go on, doctor, and win her, if you can;—you have my best wishes for your success. Leave Bergan Hall out of the question; indeed, it may never come into it, after all. Carice may refuse you——"

("Little doubt of that," thought the doctor.)

"I may alter my will a dozen times, or make a new one,——"

("You will have to be in a hurry, if you do," thought the doctor again, grimly.)

"At any rate, I expect you to frame that one so that Carice's husband, whoever he may be, can have no control whatever over the property. It is to be hers, and her children's, only. So scribble away there, at your best pace, or Proverb Dick will be here before we get through."

"But your brother Godfrey,"—began Doctor Remy, in despair, racking his brains for some consideration that would be likely to shake the Major's purpose.

"My brother Godfrey," interrupted Major Bergan, sternly, "has nothing to do with this matter. I don't give the property to him, but to Carice. Perhaps, on the whole, I had better just give her a life-interest in it, and then have it go to her eldest son, who shall take the name of Bergan, and be christened Harry. Yes, that will be the better way. Write it down so."

"But"—began Doctor Remy again.

"Save your 'buts,' until we get through," broke in Major Bergan, sharply. "I tell you, Carice *shall* have the place. If you don't want her with it, you can let her

alone. And if you can't, or won't, write my will to suit me, I'll send for some one who can and will."

This threat effectually silenced Doctor Remy. It was essential that the matter should not be taken out of his hands, till he had satisfied himself that it could in nowise be turned to his account. "If it comes to the worst," said he to himself, "it is something to have the document in my own handwriting. That gives me a better chance to furnish a substitute, at need."

With the rigid self-control that always characterized him, therefore, he now put aside, as far as might be, his own hopes and plans, and set himself diligently to the work of completing the will, in accordance with the Major's instructions, and to his entire satisfaction. He did not even move a muscle when, in due time, the Major dictated a paragraph to the effect that if Carice should not survive him, or should die without issue, the estate should fall to a distant cousin, now in Europe, whose sole claim to his consideration appeared to be that he bore the family name. The doctor was proof against any further shocks, this evening. Fate had done her worst for him, in forcing him to write "Carice Bergan," where he had confidently expected to write "Astra Lyte," and to find his account in so doing.

At the end of an hour, three closely written sheets lay upon the table, ready for the signatures of the witnesses, whenever they should appear; and the Major, drawing a long breath of relief, to see his lugubrious business so nearly finished, applied himself to the brandy bottle for appropriate refreshment. Doctor Remy sat silent, abstractedly toying with the pen that had been making such havoc with his plans.

Suddenly he raised his eyes to Major Bergan's face with the question;—

"How did that medicine suit you?"

"Admirably," replied the Major. "I have had one

attack since you were here,—a tolerably severe one, too,—but the second powder acted like a charm.”

“The second powder!” thought the doctor. “I am afraid that I gave him too many! At that rate, if chance favors him, he may hold on for a year, or more.”

He was opening his lips for another remark, when the door shook under a vigorous rap; and scarce waiting for the Major’s invitation, Dick Causton entered.

III.

BUILDING ANEW.

THE new comer opened his eyes wide at sight of Doctor Remy, and the table littered with writing materials; and looked with evident curiosity at the closely written sheets of the will, the character of which he seemed at once to discover or divine.

"I see," said he, sententiously, nodding his head,—
"Our last garment is made without pockets."

Major Bergan shivered as if he had felt a chill breath from the mouth of a tomb. It was hard to be so often reminded that he and his possessions must soon part, with small prospect of meeting again.

"If you must quote proverbs, Dick," he exclaimed peevishly, "pray don't quote such cold-blooded ones as that!"

"How could I help it, when 'it came to my hand like the bow o' a pint stoup?'" answered Dick Causton coolly, with his eyes fixed hungrily on the Major's brandy bottle.

The hint was successful. Bottle and glass were immediately placed within his reach, and he made haste to warm and quicken his age-frosted blood with a deep draught of the potent liquor. It was both strange and sad to see how his eye brightened, his face grew more animated, his figure became more erect, his whole frame seemed to gather vigor and energy, under its influence, while his air became, if possible, more mean and slouching than before. It was as if he felt conscious himself, and knew that any beholder would be sure to discover, that his proper strength and manhood had long since died out of him, and he was now drawing un-

worthy breath and life from a source of which he was thoroughly ashamed, though unable to do without it.

Major Bergan, meanwhile, briefly explained why he had sent for him, adding, in a tone that was meant to be courteous, but narrowly escaped condescension ;—

“I knew that you would be glad to do a favor to an old friend like me, Dick.”

“Certainly,” replied Richard Causton, heartily ; “especially as I suspect that I shall also be doing a favor to my young friend, Mr. Arling. ‘He that loves the tree, loves the branch,’ you know.”

Major Bergan frowned. “I don’t see what my nephew has to do with it,” said he, surlily.

Dick Causton gave him a look of surprise. “*De vrucht valt niet ver van den stam*,” said he, shaking his head. “That is to say, The fruit falls near the stem. It isn’t nature for a man to leave his property away from his own blood. It isn’t right, either, in my opinion.”

“I am not going to leave mine away from my blood,” replied Major Bergan, austere ; “though, if I were, I do not see that it is anybody’s affair but my own.”

“Nor I either,” rejoined Dick Causton, coolly, “unless your dead ancestors should imagine it to be theirs. *Os demos á os suyos quieren*,—The devils are fond of their own,—and so, doubtless, are the saints, if any such are to be found in your pedigree. It is reasonable to suppose that they would all prefer to see their earthly possessions go down in the channel marked out by nature. Anyway, I’m right glad to know that Mr. Arling is to have his rights, some day, fine fellow that he is ! I’ve always had a kindness for him, ever since I first gave him a lift, on his way to you.”

Major Bergan looked very grim. “Yes, Mr. Arling will have his rights,” said he, with stern emphasis,—“I’ve seen to that.”

Dick Causton glanced from the Major’s face to the will,

with an instinctive feeling that all was not right, but could make nothing of either. The one was dark and impenetrable; the other was upside down, from his point of view. Apparently, nothing invited attack but the brandy bottle. That, he was glad to see, was not yet empty.

"I am wasting words," said he, shrugging his shoulders. "*A chose faite conseil pris.* 'Advice after action is like medicine after death'—or brandy after one has ceased to be thirsty."

"Take another glass," said Major Bergan.

Dick obeyed with alacrity. The dram was scarcely swallowed, ere a tap at the door announced the arrival of the overseer from "Number Two,"—a tall, lank, taciturn Texan, whom the Major had recently taken into his employ, as a short cut to that avoidance of the rice fields which Doctor Remy had recommended.

The ceremonies of signing and sealing the will immediately followed. Dick Causton was greatly disappointed that the document was not read in his hearing, as he had expected.

"Never buy a pig in a poke, nor sign a paper without reading it," said he, as he took the pen into his hand. "How am I to tell what will I really signed, if I know nothing of the contents? However, it's your risk, not mine," he added, hastily, seeing that Major Bergan was beginning to look impatient. And, forthwith, he bent his energies to the task of writing his name in a large, angular, and very tremulous hand; and then shook his head dubiously over the result.

"It looks like nothing that ever I wrote before," he remarked, as he laid down the pen. "But *Hund er hund om han er aldrig saa broget*,—A dog is a dog whatever be his color,—and so, a signature must be a signature though it wiggle across the paper like a tipsy eel. Perhaps I shall know it by that token, when I see it again. But I can't promise."

"I shall know mine," observed the overseer, confidently, as he lifted the pen..

Doctor Remy leaned forward with sudden interest. The name was written in commonplace fashion enough, but it was finished with an odd, complicated flourish.

"Do you always sign your name in that way?" he asked.

"Always."

"It looks very difficult; yet you seemed to do it with much ease. Let me see the process again." And he pushed a piece of paper over to the man, who, gratified to find his skill so heartily appreciated, scrawled it all over with his sign-manual, in wearisome repetition. The paper was then passed from one to another, for a brief examination, and was finally left in the hands of Doctor Remy; who first began absently to roll it round his fingers, and ended by tearing it in three or four pieces, in a fit of apparent abstraction. Nobody noticed that one of these found its way into his pocket as a thing of possible utility, in the future.

He then rose. "I am sorry to be obliged to go so soon," said he, courteously, "but a physician's time is not his own. Good evening, Major Bergan, I am always at your service, and in any capacity. Good evening, Mr. Causton, doubtless, we shall meet again."

Dick glanced at the brandy bottle, and, seeing that it was empty, was taken with a sudden fancy for the doctor's society.

"I'll walk along with you, doctor, at least as far as our road is one," said he, rising. "Good company makes short miles."

"I came in the saddle," answered Doctor Remy, "but we can be companions as far as the gate, if you like."

Nevertheless, the pair did not separate at the gate. Their conversation had become too interesting, apparently,

to both; and Dick Causton continued to walk on by the side of the doctor's horse.

It was late when he reached his cabin, that night. Very suggestively, too, he reeled across the threshold, and, missing the bed, deposited himself heavily on the floor.

"*Tidt meder man ei did som man vil skyde*, A man does not always aim at what he means to hit,"—he muttered, resignedly, merely changing his position for a more comfortable one, and dozing off to sleep.

Somewhere, on the way—or out of it—apparently, he had found a supplementary brandy bottle, and had not left it until it was as empty as the Major's.

It was late, too, when Doctor Remy laid his head on his pillow, that night. And, perhaps, in all Berganton, there was no wearier nor sadder man than he. One apparently well-constructed plan had just gone to pieces in his hands, without note of warning. Another was now to be built up out of the fragments, pitilessly rejecting whatever had been an element of weakness in the first. Already, its outline had begun to shape itself dimly against his mental horizon. Yet he did not allow himself to linger upon it to-night. With the rigid self-control which he habitually exercised, he put aside disappointment, care, and hope, and soon slept as soundly as if no anxiety rested on his mind, no stain on his conscience.

He was early astir. With the morning light came quickness and clearness of thought. His scheme began to look more distinct and feasible. By way of getting it in hand at once, he tapped lightly at the door of Astra's studio.

He was somewhat surprised to find her before an easel, palette and brushes in hand. She smiled and blushed at his approach.

"I know what you would say," she began, apologetically,—"'A Jack at all trades,' *et cætera*, but I really

wanted color for *this* subject." She pointed to her canvas. "Do you recognize it?"

"I can see that those are Miss Bergan's eyes," replied Doctor Remy;—"all else is delightfully vague and suggestive."

"And what eyes they are!" exclaimed Astra, admiringly,—not without a pleasant perception, too, that she had succeeded wonderfully well in putting them on canvas.

Doctor Remy did not answer immediately. He was regarding the portrait with a gravity that Astra could not understand,—unless, indeed, his thoughts were elsewhere. Nevertheless, when he spoke, it was sufficiently to the point.

"Yes, they are very fine eyes," said he. "And Miss Bergan is altogether very pretty,—in an uncommon style, too. It is surprising that she has remained heartfree so long."

Astra looked at him with soft, smiling, amused eyes. "Heartfree! As much as I am," said she.

Doctor Remy gave her a questioning look.

"I am not going to tell you anything about it," said she, laughingly. "Use your eyes, sometimes, in watching your neighbors, as I do."

"Who *is* my neighbor?" asked Doctor Remy, smiling.

"The proper question!" laughed Astra. "In this case, you need not journey beyond this roof, to find him."

Doctor Remy's eyes lit with a sudden, strange gleam. "Do you *know* it is so?" he asked, quickly.

"No, I cannot quite say that;—I doubt if she knows it herself yet. But I believe it, all the same."

Doctor Remy watched her absently for some moments, then made a few curt, critical remarks about her work, bade her a cool good morning, and withdrew.

Astra looked after him, with a troubled, wondering expression.

"What has come over him?" she asked herself. "How

have I offended him? Or was it only my fancy that he seemed so cold and strange?"

Before Doctor Remy began his professional rounds, that morning, he had sketched, in outline, the main features of a new plan for the acquisition of Bergan Hall. The minor details he wisely left to the suggestions of time and circumstance.

One of these proved to be very close at hand. As he drove mechanically through the principal street of Berganton, revolving various probabilities and possibilities in his mind, and trying to make some provision for each, he espied Miss Ferrars coming up the sidewalk,—easily recognizable, at almost any distance, by her peculiarly mincing and swaying gait. In all similar encounters with the slightly faded maiden,—whom he shrewdly suspected of designs upon his bachelor liberty,—it had been his wont to slide swiftly past, with a low and deprecatory bow, suggestive of his deep regret that the urgency of his haste denied him the pleasure of stopping to inquire after her health. On this occasion, therefore, she was agreeably surprised to see him rein his horse up to the sidewalk, with the obvious intention of speaking to her. Perhaps her heart beat a little more quickly, as she stopped to listen.

Apparently, however, he had nothing of more importance to communicate than a commonplace enough observation about the heat of the weather, and a friendly caution not to walk far in so fervid a sunshine as was flooding the town with its golden waves. Then, he gathered up his reins, as if to signify that his say was said, and he was ready to proceed. Nevertheless, he lingered a moment longer, to add, carelessly,—

"By the way, I ought to acknowledge that you were right, and I was wrong, the other day. It is not the first time that man's reason has had to admit the superior correctness, as well as quickness, of woman's intuition."

Miss Ferrars looked both pleased and puzzled. "It is very good of you to say so," she answered, simpering;—"but really, I can't think what you allude to."

"When you called at my office, a few days ago," explained the doctor, "you did me the honor to confide to me your impressions with regard to my friends, Miss Lyte and Mr. Arling. I thought you were mistaken, and told you so. It turns out, however, that the mistake was on my part, not yours. I was really blind—not wilfully so, as you had the charity to suppose. I mention the matter the more readily because it must soon be patent to everybody. Good morning."

And without waiting for a reply, Doctor Remy courteously lifted his hat, and went his way, with a curious smile on his lips.

"That last intimation ensures speed," said he to himself. "Miss Ferrars will do her best to be beforehand with the news. Before to-morrow morning, it will be known throughout the town. Then, I can easily manage so that it shall reach the Major's ears, and—by the help of my loving commentary—produce the desired effect. Astra must be gotten out of the way, for the present, at least. So must Arling; last night's business convinced me that he is more dangerous than I imagined. The Major deceives himself, but he does not deceive me; his bitterness towards his nephew is nothing more than piqued and smothered affection,—affection undergoing fermentation, as it were, and certain to work itself clear and sweet, in time. If Arling remains in the neighborhood, the Major will soon be seizing upon some pretext for a reconciliation. Failing of that, Miss Carice is certain to inherit his estate; just because he wooed—and did not win—her mother, some twenty-five or thirty years ago! No doubt, a marriage between the two would suit him exactly, if he once got hold of the idea. Yes, Arling must be gotten rid of. But how?"

He bent his brows moodily. Some expedient, appar-

ently, soon suggested itself to him, and was immediately rejected with a shake of the head.

"No, not *that* way," he muttered. "I'm determined against actual, point-blank crime, so called,—except as a last resource. Besides, it is not necessary ; I only want to get rid of him until the Major is dead, and Miss Carice is my wife. There *must* be some way to dispose of him, by lawful means, if I could only hit upon it ! Really, if there were a Devil, as some people believe, he would strain a point now in my favor ! At all events, I think I see my way clear with Astra."

He was silent, for an instant ; his brow grew sombre with unwonted regret.

"Poor Astra !" he murmured, as he drove into the cathedral-like gloom of the far-stretching pine barren,—“ I am really loath to give her up ! But her chance of the Hall, I see now, is not worth a picayune. And it won't do to trust to the possibility of substituting a manufactured will for the real one, as long as I cannot find out where the latter is deposited. The Major was very close-mouthed about *that* matter. No, Miss Carice is my safest resort. Yet Astra would suit me much better, on the whole.” And once again, looking absently up the long, columned vista of the narrow road, he murmured regretfully ;—

“ Poor Astra ! ”

IV.

A SERMON.

THE next day was Sunday. It came to the earth, as it comes always, with kindly, hallowed hands full of blessings, but found not everywhere hearts and minds open to receive them. Carice Bergan, to be sure, knelt in her accustomed place, in the little church of her fathers, with a face which might almost have rivalled that of an angel in its bright peacefulness, and with all the windows of her soul plainly open to the heavenly sunshine. Bergan Arling, too, conscious that each one of these holy days had its own special gift or grace for him, its own kind and measure of spiritual food, which he could ill afford to lose, knelt in his proper place, and reverently lent his full, rich voice to swell the solemn flow of common prayer, or the harmonious burst of choral praise. And Mrs. Lyte, in her widow's weeds, looking upward in spirit, to the long peace of Paradise, and the shining faces of the redeemed, was glad to believe in "the communion of saints," and rejoiced in the day that was both a foretaste and a promise of the "life everlasting." Even Astra Lyte, though suffering from a vague and nameless depression,—a burden of which, as yet, she felt only the weight and chill, without comprehending, or daring to try to comprehend, whence it came or what it meant,—was sensible of a dim delight, and possibly a latent helpfulness, in the sweet and solemn influences of the day and the place. Here and there, moreover, a soul bowed under the weight of recent affliction, or shaken with the terrors of a newly-awakened conscience, was both awed and glad to be able to give itself audible

expression in words so fit and forcible as those of the Confession and the Litany, and thankful if it might pick up so much as a crumb of pardon and peace from the Master's bountiful table.

But, to Doctor Remy, paying an unwilling tribute to public opinion by showing himself at church, on this morning, after many weeks of absence, and leaving it to be inferred that, but for his professional duties, he would be seen there regularly; to Miss Ferrars, mingling solemn words of confession and penitence with frivolous thoughts of dress and gossip; to Dick Causton, slinking shamefacedly into the rear pew, to listen to the conclusion of the sweet, old, familiar hymn, the first sounds of which had fallen enticingly upon his ear, as he was staggering up the street;—to these, and many others like them, doubtless, Sunday brought only present irksomeness and future condemnation.

The hymn being finished, Mr. Islay ascended the pulpit, and, laying his manuscript open before him, looked round on the crowded congregation, with serious, almost melancholy, eyes. Perhaps he sought, amid those upturned faces, for some sign of human sympathy, to lighten a little his heavy sense of responsibility; perhaps he wondered to which of these souls his words were now to prove a savor of life unto life, and to which, a savor of death unto death. Deep and clear, and full of a solemn music, his voice broke the silence.

"In the fifth chapter of Proverbs, and in the twenty-second verse, it is written:

'HE SHALL BE HOLDEN WITH THE CORDS OF HIS SINS.'

Three faces were at once alive with interest. Doctor Remy, indeed, gave a slight and almost imperceptible start, as if his intellect not only, but his memory or his conscience, had felt an awakening touch. Bergan Arling merely fixed his eyes more intently on the speaker, with the aspect

of a man who was glad to find that the coming discourse was likely to link into, and carry on, some previous train of thought. As for Dick Causton, the word "Proverbs" was sufficient to command his earnest, and even critical, attention. He believed that he knew a good deal about proverbs himself; he had made a lifelong study of their characteristics and principles of interpretation; he had often declared those of Solomon—such as were strictly proverbs—to be of the best; he would stay and hear what a tyro like Mr. Islay had to say about this particular one.

This, briefly, was what the clergyman said.

"Many texts are like rosebuds. They have a simple form, and an obvious signification. But if you steep them in the dew of meditation and the sunshine of faith, they begin to unfold meaning after meaning, as the rosebud petal after petal; and in the centre there is a golden heart,—the gracious blessing of God on the fervent and prayerful spirit, and the inquiring and teachable mind. Let us pray that the text which we are considering, may prove such an one to each of us.

"A man's sin is sure to find him out. It may have been committed in secret, muffled thickly with caution, and finally buried deep under time and distance and circumstance; it may remain hidden for years; it may have been forgotten, except for an occasional dark moment, by the sinner himself; yet, some time, some day, what seems to be a chance, but is truly a providence, lifts the veil, and takes hold of the clue,—or death throws the lurid light of his inverted torch over the dark transaction,—and the liar, the thief, the adulterer, the murderer, or whatever may be the miserable man's miserable name, is brought to the bar either of human or divine justice. And there is no escape. The bands of his iniquity are around him; they bind him hand and foot; he is holden with the cords of his sins.

"This is perhaps the first and most obvious meaning of the text. It assures us that, 'though punishment be lame,

it arrives.' It warns us not to make cords which are certain to be used, some day, for our own binding.

"But men are apt to think lightly of a remote evil. The present monopolizes their fears, as it does their labors. Moreover (they say), there are dozens of little, everyday sins, which entail no such fearful consequences. Let us see how our text bears upon these points.

"Sin is not a simple, but a complex, thing. It is a cord twisted of many threads, and some of them begin very far back. A man is seldom taken in the toils of a sudden, single temptation, or bound with the cords of an utterly unimagined and unpremeditated sin. He has made the way and work easy to each of them, by yielding to preliminary temptations, and carelessly allowing the binding of preparatory sins. He is holden with the cords of the evil thought to the unhallowed desire and the foul gratification. He is holden with the cords of that seemingly venial sin to this final burden of guilt and shame, by that unbridled passion to this startling, terrible crime. The slender cord draws the stout one after it: at sight of *that*, the man may start and shrink, but he is already half-bound, and his resistance is feeble. Having taken the first step, he is committed to the second; having admitted the premise, he is bound to the logical conclusion. Here, as before, he is holden with the cords of his sins.

"Moreover, there are few things stronger, for good or ill, than habit. And every sin, however small, *may* begin an evil habit, and is *sure* to confirm one. Round and round goes the slender cord, till it binds as strongly as a chain of iron. One part after another yields to the subtle, stealing influence; first, the will succumbs; then, the reason; finally, the conscience. Day by day, good ceases to attract, and evil to repel. Day by day, the right becomes more difficult, and the wrong easier. The habit soon becomes fixed; the man is firmly bound. To the side of evil, and the service of Satan, he is holden with the cords of his sins.

“Again: If thought be the spring of action, action is also the spring of thought. If it be true that, ‘as a man thinks, he is,’ so it is true that as he is, he thinks. Thought is by turns cause and effect. If a man’s sins are the result of his evil thoughts, so his evil and erroneous thoughts are sometimes the result of his sins. He cannot long continue to think right if he act wrong. After breaking the Sabbath awhile, he ceases to think of it as a holy day. After committing murder, he ceases to regard life as sacred. Violating human law, it becomes a terror instead of a protection. Defying the Divine law, he soon denies its authority. Sin distorts his views, as well as his life. The truths of religion lose their clearness to his mind with their power to influence his action. Doubts, scepticism, infidelity, find an open door, and an easy road, to his heart. If a man would keep fast hold of his Christian faith, let him take care to order his actions, as far as possible, in conformity to its precepts. But, on the other hand, let him give free rein to his appetites and ambitions,—yea, even to the commission of absolute crime,—if he wishes to become a mocker and an infidel, without love of God or man, without correct views of time or clear ones of eternity. For, to all these things, he will be sure to be holden with the cords of his sins.

“Finally; All men love liberty. But sin, though it may seem, at first, to be the wildest liberty, soon proves to be the narrowest bondage. The sinner is the slave of appetites, of habits, of thoughts, that are hard task-masters; and the wages of which are every kind of death. For there are many kinds,—social, political, moral, before the final, everlasting death;—and one, or all, of these, he is sure to taste, as the reward of his faithful service of Satan. His health is undermined, or his reputation destroyed; his fortune is dissipated, or his gold corroded in the using; he is shaken with the terrors of conscience, or hardened into the semblance of stone; he is without adequate consolation in

the day of trouble, and without strengthening hope in the day of death ; but his slavery is abject and absolute. He neither will nor can escape. He is holden with the cords of his sins.

“ Thus you will see, beloved, that our text has a word of solemn warning for the present, as well as for the future. The holding of sin is to be dreaded in life, not less than at death. One sin holds fast to another. Single sins twist together into the strong cord of habitual sin. The sinful act draws after it evil thoughts and loose opinions. Sin is a continual, daily bondage, as well as a final retribution.

“ Beware then, oh, ye young ! how you bind yourselves with cords of sinful thoughts, or habits, or opinions, or passions, to the exclusion of that blessed liberty which is in Christ Jesus. Beware, oh, ye adults ! how you go on adding sin to sin, and cord to cord, till you are bound hand and foot, thought and will, body and soul ; and are finally cast down to perdition, in bonds of your own industrious forging—holden with the cords of your sins !

“ But,—do you say ?—we are all sinners, we are all ‘ holden,’ how are we to break from the cords of our sins ? Go to Christ. At His feet, all bonds are broken, all slavery ends. He leads captivity captive, and His service is perfect freedom. He is our righteousness, and the man that trusteth in Him, shall no more be holden with the cords of His sins.”

Such was the substance of the sermon. But in the delivery, there was a warmth and an earnestness, a happiness of expression and illustration, and a deep solemnity, that held the congregation spell-bound with interest, to the end !

Perhaps no one had listened more attentively, or humbly, than Bergan Arling. So recently had he felt the irksome holding of the cords of his sins ! And he would still, no doubt, be holden to their consequences, all the days of his life, if not to their guilt.

As for Doctor Remy, there was an unusual pallor in

his face, when he rose, at the singing of the last hymn. But it was quickly gone ; he came out of the church with much of his usual cold, composed demeanor. His sins had held him too long to loosen their stricture at one transient quake of conscience.

Dick Causton had listened for some time with marked attention, and apparent approval. Then, a kind of haze had slowly bedimmed his sight and beclouded his brain. When the congregation came down the aisles, he was fast asleep, with his head drooping heavily on his breast. If anything could have added to the effect of the sermon, this sight ought to have done so. Most certainly, poor Dick was "holden with the cords of his sins."

When the church was empty, he was shaken rudely by the sexton, and turned out, muttering caustic proverbs by way of retaliation.

V.

PARTINGS.

BERGAN and Doctor Remy walked home from the church, as they had gone thither, side by side; yet, for a considerable time, neither spoke. If not altogether congenial spirits, they were on sufficiently easy and familiar terms, in virtue of their almost daily association, to allow each to pursue his own train of thought, on occasion, without reference to the other.

To Bergan, Mr. Islay's sermon had been interesting and effective, not only for what it contained, but for what it suggested. Naturally, therefore, his mind was now busy in following out those suggestions to the point where they bore upon his own experience, and unfolded their lessons for his own soul.

But Dr. Remy's thoughts had long since strayed away from any channel into which the sermon was calculated to lead them. There had been some brief moments, during its delivery, to be sure, when he had shrunken inwardly, iron-nerved though he were, from the deep, sharp probing of certain of its sentences; and there had been a single instant, perhaps, wherein he had been made dimly to see, or to suspect, that his own life and character—much as he had prided himself upon being the independent artificer of them both—were really the results to which he had been holden by the cords of former, half-forgotten sins. But he had made haste to shake himself free from both the idea and its effect, with one smile of scorn at his own folly, and another at what he chose to consider the weak superstition of the clergyman and his awed, interested flock. He thanked

God—using the phrase in a vague, general sense which, perhaps, was only equivalent to thanking himself—that he was not as these men were. And no sooner was he in the open air than he set his busy mind to the consideration of his own projects. Some clue to its workings may perhaps be afforded by the question with which he finally broke the silence.

“Have you ever had the yellow fever, Arling?”

“No; it does not visit our western villages.”

“Then, I advise you to take refuge in one of them, for the next three months. It is certain to visit Berganton ere long.”

“Indeed!” said Bergan, with more curiosity than alarm. “Why do you think so?”

“From the weather, the atmosphere, the present type of disease,—a dozen indications patent to the eye of experience. Besides, I am informed by a private letter that it has already appeared in New Orleans. Its arrival here is but a question of time. And I assure you that its acquaintance is to be avoided.”

“Doubtless. And I shall do my best to avoid it—except by running away.”

“You might as well say,” answered Doctor Remy, dryly, “that you will take every precaution against drowning—except to keep your head above water. Don’t be fool-hardy, Arling. Yellow Jack has a keen appetite for strangers,—that is to say, for all who are not native born. If he spares any, it is usually the sickly and feeble, not the strong and vigorous. He would consider you a toothsome morsel. Take my advice, and go home, or go North, or take a sea-voyage,—do anything rather than remain here during the last of summer and the beginning of autumn. It will be no loss to you. After the first of next month, there will be absolutely nothing for a lawyer to do here but try to keep cool.”

“And you?” asked Bergan.

"Oh, I stay, of course. An epidemic is a physician's harvest time. Besides, I have had the yellow fever."

"Then the native-born do not all escape?"

"By no means. Besides, I lost my birthright by many years' absence in Europe. It was immediately after my return that I was taken. Now I may consider myself acclimated."

"As I must be," replied Bergan, "if, as is likely, I am to spend the remainder of my life at the South. Thank you for your friendly warning, but I think I must stay."

Doctor Remy shrugged his shoulders, and said no more. He had merely tried the first and simplest expedient which occurred to him, for removing Bergan from the neighborhood. He was not surprised nor troubled that it had failed. He had expected as much. But there were other and surer means to his end, he believed, at his command.

However, he was not obliged to resort to them. Early next morning Bergan came into his office, with an open letter in his hand, and a most anxious face.

"Read that," said he, huskily, "and tell me if there is any hope."

Doctor Remy obeyed, reading the letter not once only, but twice, and looking long and meditatively at the signature. Then he lifted his eyes to Bergan's face.

"Plenty of hope, in my opinion," said he. "I do not attach as much importance as this Doctor Trubie does to your mother's fancy that she is going to die. It only argues a depressed state of mind, corresponding to a low state of body. Nevertheless, it is well to do whatever can be done to raise her spirits; and I suspect that your presence at her bedside will avail much to that end. Of course, you set out at once?"

"Certainly. Can you tell me at what hour the next train leaves Savalla?"

Doctor Remy glanced at his watch. "In an hour and a half. That gives you ample time;—fifteen minutes to

throw a few things into a portmanteau, and tell me what I can do for you while you are away ; five minutes for *adieux*, and an hour and ten minutes to reach Savalla, in the saddle, with a swift horse."

"If I can find one at such short notice," said Bergan, doubtfully.

Doctor Remy pulled a bell-wire, and Scipio's black head appeared as instantaneously as if he had been attached to the other end of it.

"Saddle the roan, and take him round to the front gate," said Doctor Remy. "Mr. Arling will ride him to Savalla. You will go after him, by the stage, this afternoon. Quick now!"

The head ducked, and disappeared.

"How can I thank you!" exclaimed Bergan, wringing the doctor's hand.

"By attending to the portmanteau business at once. I will come with you ; we can talk while you work. I want to ask something about this Doctor Trubie. Does he keep up with the times,—in medicine, that is?"

"I don't know—I believe so."

"H'm ; there have been some recent discoveries of great value in the treatment of typhoids, when they run long and low, as they are apt to do. Suppose I write down a few suggestions, which, if there is grave need, you can commend to Doctor Trubie's favorable consideration. Otherwise, don't interfere."

Bergan tried once more to express his gratitude, as the folded paper was put in his hand ; but Doctor Remy cut him short.

"If you really want to thank me," said he, "do it by staying away until the sickly season is over ; I shall have yellow fever patients enough without you. Indeed, you *must* ; having left, it would be suicidal to come back before the first of November. Tell your mother that I said so, when she is convalescent."

"When she is convalescent," repeated Bergan, quickly. "Then you *do* hope!"

"Of course I do. There is every reason for it. Your mother, being a Bergan, has a sound constitution, and an almost indomitable vitality; and she is not yet old. If Trubie makes a good fight, he is sure to win. At any rate, never despair till the breath is out of the body; nor even then, till you are certain that it cannot be brought back."

Bergan could not but feel a pang of self-reproach for his long-smothered dislike and distrust of the man who was thus loading him with obligations,—help on his way to his mother, ready encouragement, and valuable professional advice. It did not occur to him that there is such a thing as doing good that evil may come!

Doctor Remy looked after him with a triumphant smile. "One out of my way already!" he exclaimed. "It would seem that the Devil (another name for Fate or Chance) *has* helped me!"

Bergan next sought Mrs. Lyte and Astra, for a parting word. He found the latter in her studio, sitting idly by a window, with her hands folded listlessly in her lap, and a weary, dejected face that went to his heart. Never before had he seen her otherwise than busy, bright, and earnest; never had she met his look with so faint and transient a smile.

"I am sorry that you are going," said she, sombrely; "sorrrier, perhaps, than the occasion may seem to warrant. But I cannot rid myself of a suspicion that this phase of our life and friendship is finished; and who can tell what the next may be! Do you remember our first meeting under the oaks, and the red sunset light, and the dark sunset cloud? You interpreted them to mean that we were to know sunshine and shade together, did you not? Well, we have had the sunshine; now, it is time for the shade."

"You forget," said Bergan, kindly, "that the cloud was but for a moment, and the sunshine returned."

"No, I remember it well. But the cloud was very dark while it lasted, and the shine was not quite so bright afterward. It was nearer to its setting."

Bergan could scarcely believe that it was Astra who spoke. Hitherto, she had been the moral sunshine of the house, felt even where it did not directly fall. Her spirit, in its potency of cheer, resembled the sunbeam which, though it kindle but one little spot on the floor into actual brightness, diffuses its light and cheerfulness throughout a whole room. As every article of furniture, every picture, every face, in the room, is the brighter for the sunbeam, so every inmate of Mrs. Lyte's rambling old dwelling had been the happier for Astra's presence and influence. The sound of her clear, buoyant voice, the thought of her light, busy figure, just across the hall, had always served to quicken and brighten his own energies. It had been very much his wont to bring all his shadows, discouragements, and despondencies, to be dissipated by contact with her breezy activity and cheery hopefulness. What had come over her, that she met him now with such dreary premonition of ill, such persistent dwelling upon the dark side? He looked down upon her with the question in his eyes, if not on his lips.

She understood and answered it.

"It is only a dark mood," said she, passing her hand over her brow, "not an actual trouble,—at least, not yet. But forgive me for afflicting you with it now, when you are under the shadow of a real cloud. Let us hope that it will pass quickly. When you reach home, may the sunshine be already there!"

"Thank you. I shall expect to hear from you through Doctor Remy—all of you, I mean. He has promised to let me know how everything goes on here."

Astra lifted her eyes searchingly to his face. Her fine

perceptions had not failed to take note of his inadvertent linking together of Doctor Remy and herself, and his quick attempt to conceal it. She divined that he knew her secret. Her eyes fell, and her face flushed.

Bergan took her hand, and lifted it, in gentle, chivalrous fashion, to his lips. "I wish you every happiness," said he, in a tone that said more than the words,—“every sunshine, and few clouds. Good-bye.”

“Good-bye,” she answered, withdrawing her hand, yet not without a certain lingering pressure, that seemed even sadder than her face, and that Bergan felt long afterwards. And he left her sitting where he found her.

Mrs. Lyte and Cathie followed him to the door, the one with much quiet sympathy and regret, the other with passionate tears and lamentations.

“He will not come back! He will not come back!” she screamed, wringing her hands, as he rode away; and the mournful cry followed him down the street, like a prophecy of woe.

A little farther on, he discovered that Nix was trotting quietly alongside of his horse. And so intimately had the dog been connected with all his sojourn under Mrs. Lyte’s roof, that, in sending him back, he seemed to close the final page of this whole epoch of his life.

His road skirted a retired portion of the grounds of Oakstead. Suddenly, he espied Carice, standing on the bank of the creek, with her eyes thoughtfully fixed upon its rippling flow. His sad heart yearned towards her with irresistible force. Glancing at his watch, he saw that there was yet time for a brief, parting word. He flung himself from his horse, threw the bridle over a gatepost, and ran quickly towards her.

“I am so glad to find you here!” he exclaimed, as he drew near. “Otherwise, I must have gone without saying good-bye. I am sent for, in great haste; my mother is very ill, and —”

He stopped; his grave face said the rest.

"I am very, very sorry!" putting her hand in his, with quick, earnest sympathy. "When did you hear?"

"This morning. She insisted that I should be sent for, as soon as she was taken ill; she believed that she could not recover. It is the typhoid fever."

Carice's face blanched suddenly. "Ah! that has a fearful sound," she said, shiveringly. "My two brothers"—

Her voice failed, and her slight frame shook with sudden emotion. It was the first time that Bergan had heard her allude to the only sorrow which she had yet known; but the effect of which had been all the more keenly felt, doubtless, because, for her parents' sake, she had shut it resolutely into the depths of her heart, never allowing its shadow to be seen for a moment on the face wherein they now looked for consolation and cheer.

Much moved, Bergan put his arm round the slender, tremulous form. At first, it was only the blind, manly instinct of help and support that prompted him; but with the act there came a swift revelation, a great rush of tenderness, that almost took his breath away. Though he had never suspected it till now, he knew, in an instant, beyond the possibility of a doubt, not only that he loved Carice, but that he had loved her long.

Carice, on her part, was quick to feel the sudden, subtle change in the character of the support given her, and made a fluttering movement of escape. But Bergan would not let her go.

"Carice," said he, gravely, "if I should return sorrowing, will you console me?"

"If I can," she answered, simply, raising her blue eyes to his face.

"If you can!" he repeated, with a deep tender intonation,—“oh, Carice! it must be a heavy sorrow indeed that you cannot console!”

As he spoke, the day, which had hitherto been cloudy,

suddenly broke into a smile, pouring a flood of golden light on the river, trickling through the boughs of the overhanging trees in great, shining drops, and flinging a yellow gleam far down their gray trunks. Wondrous sympathy of Nature with the bliss of two spirits made one,—the tender joy that keeps, throughout the musty years, the freshness and fragrance of its Eden birth! Yet, had the day still held its gloom, it would have been bright in Carice's eyes, and bright in Bergan's! Wherever Love is newly born, it creates a sunshine of the heart, which overflows upon the outward world, and fills it with celestial radiance.

Five minutes later, and Carice was alone by the river's bank, blushing to hear how persistently the little stream kept whispering and singing of what it had just seen and heard. The leaves, too, seemed to be softly talking it over among themselves; and a red bird and a gray one were gossiping merrily about it among the branches.

Still more plainly, Carice's face told the story, when she sought her parents. They saw at once that it was not the same face which had gone out from them an hour before. It had changed as an opening rosebud must have changed in the same time, under the balmy breathing of the warm south wind. Its merely girlish loveliness was over; playing about the mouth, and shining from the eyes, there was a bright and tender smile that seemed gushing from the very heart of awakening womanhood. Never had she seemed so lovely, never so radiant. Looking upon her, it was easy to divine the secret of angelic beauty. The heavenly existences are immortally beautiful because immortally happy.

"Did you engage yourself to him?" asked Mr. Bergan, almost sternly, when her brief tale was told.

"Of course not," answered Carice, opening wide her blue eyes at the unusual tone,—“not until you and mamma are consulted. Only, we know that we love each other.”

At the same time, Dr. Remy stood smiling to himself, in his office,—a dark, ominous smile.

“I am sure of three months,” said he. “And, in three months, tact and perseverance can accomplish a great deal.”

At the same time, too, Astra rose suddenly from the chair, where Bergan had left her sitting, and began to pace up and down the room.

“I have been idle too long,” she said to herself; “I have let myself dream till my world is peopled with shadows, and I cannot distinguish the false from the true. Work is what I want. Work will exorcise these phantoms, and make my brain clear and strong again.”

She stopped and looked fixedly into vacancy, striving to recall a former conception that had been dazzled out of sight in the golden dawn of her love. In a moment, it rose again before her; a great, stalwart, straining figure,—a man struggling up out of the waves that had wellnigh worsted him, with a little child on his shoulders.

Quickly she improvised a kind of platform, and brought out her fertile box of clay. Nervously, she fastened her supports together; rapidly around them rose the soft, gray, plastic material in the rude, rough resemblance of a human form.

VI.

WITH A DOUBLE HEART.

NOW and then, on a summer's day, the air is suddenly filled with minute, swarming insects of the genus *ephemera*. They come unnoticed and unheralded; the air is thick with them ere one is aware; ears, mouths, and nostrils are filled with them, despite all efforts to the contrary; they are variously regarded from the scientific, the poetic, and the moral point of view, or merely as nuisances; by and by, they are gone as they came.

In just such wise, a swarm of rumors prejudicial to the reputation of Bergan Arling suddenly filled the air of Berganton; coming no one knew whence, but quickly circulating everywhere, to be variously met with surprise, doubt, belief, regret, anger, and indifference. It was averred that he had gone home deeply in debt, at least to his good friend Doctor Remy, who certainly deserved better treatment at his hands. It was alleged that he was hopelessly the victim of a depraved appetite for strong drink, although, by the help of the same good friend, he had managed, thus far, to save himself from public exposure. It was affirmed that he had persuaded Astra Lyte into a secret engagement, perhaps for the sake of mere pastime, perhaps with a view to the ultimate possession of the roof which had so long sheltered him, or to the union of his own with Astra's chances for the future ownership of Bergan Hall. Finally, it was shrewdly suspected that, having grown weary alike of the debts, the engagement, and the measure of constraint which he had hitherto exercised over himself, he had suddenly broken away from all three, with the trumped-up

excuse of his mother's illness, and taken himself off, not to return.

Coming, as has been said, no one knew from whence, and having no apparent voucher, these rumors nevertheless penetrated to counting-rooms and boudoirs, to offices and to bar-rooms, to Major Bergan on his vast estate, and Dick Causton in his narrow cabin, to Godfrey Bergan at his desk, and Carice beside her mother,—everywhere, save to the two persons most directly interested; namely, Bergan Arling on his rapid way homeward, and Astra Lyte in her studio.

Astra was hard at work now. Every hour, her clay model grew in strength or symmetry under her rapid touches. Yet her hope of finding clearness and quietness of mind in the exercise of her beloved art, had been woefully disappointed. The phantoms of doubt and anxiety which had haunted her idleness were not laid by her industry, but only held in abeyance until the inevitable moment of exhaustion, or of suspended inspiration, brought them upon her again, with tenfold power to annoy. Do what she would, she could not shut her eyes to the fact that a change had come over Doctor Remy, nor prevent herself from speculating as to its nature and cause. At first, it was only that miserable and dream-like change of look and manner which forbids one to complain, because it gives no lucid explanation of itself to the intellect, however it may disturb and depress the heart. Its effect was magical, nevertheless, in clearing Astra's vision from that soft, transfiguring haze of the imagination through which love delights to gaze at its object, and in giving her occasional glimpses into the depths and intricacies of Doctor Remy's character. Unconsciously, whenever he came near her, she fell to watching his words, his tones, his looks, even his motions and attitudes, for indications of the hidden, inner man, upon whose qualities and tendencies her happiness so largely depended. The object of this scrutiny was too

keen-witted not to be aware of it, and too subtile not to avail himself of it to further his own ends. With apparent carelessness, but consummate art, he allowed more and more of his true character to come to the surface; he showed himself scornful toward religion, faithless toward mankind, indifferent and unsympathizing toward herself, in the hope of quickly transforming her affection into disgust, and forcing her to put a speedy end to their engagement. Doing this whenever he met her, he none the less took good care to make it manifest that he avoided her as far as possible.

Under these circumstances, no wonder that Astra grew pale and thin, that alternately she worked as in a fever, or stood idle as in a dream, that her old, cheery alacrity gave place to sombre restlessness, and her glow of happy spirits to pale depression, that, in short, she speedily became so unlike herself as greatly to alarm Mrs. Lyte, who finally appealed to Doctor Remy. He was only too glad to prescribe immediate change of air and scene.

Mrs. Lyte stood aghast.

"I do not see how I can manage it," said she, slowly. "My income is just sufficient for our present mode of life; there is no surplus to meet the added expense of a health trip."

Doctor Remy mused for a moment. "We will talk over this matter again," said he, at length, looking at his watch; just now I have an engagement. But trust my assurance that wherever there is a plain necessity for a thing, there is a way to obtain it. Good morning."

Doctor Remy's engagement did not prevent him from repairing straightway to Bergan Hall, whither the rumors already alluded to had preceded him. And so artfully did he work upon Major Bergan's hasty and arbitrary temper as to induce him forthwith to warn Mrs. Lyte of the existence of the forfeited mortgage, and his intention to foreclose at an early day. Be it said, however, in the Major's behalf, that he graciously designed said warning to play somewhat of

the part of a blessing in disguise. For, having first shown Mrs. Lyte how completely she was in his power, it was his generous intention to offer her the largest mercy thereafter, even to the immediate relinquishment of every claim against her estate, on the easy condition that she and her daughter should at once break off all relations and engagements with his nephew, Bergan Arling. Thus, he would save Astra from what he was easily persuaded would turn out to be a most unhappy marriage; at the same time that he would gratify a certain odd itching in his fingers to meddle in Bergan's affairs. The whole business was arranged in less than an hour, and Doctor Remy returned homeward triumphant.

Nor was his elation at all shadowed by any thought of the suffering about to be inflicted at his instigation. Men of his naturally hard and forceful character, intensified by long culture of the intellect at the expense of the sensibilities, are apt to take a terribly straight path in one sense, if a wofully crooked one in another, to whatever end they have in view. The feelings of others, where they cannot be made to subserve their purposes, are regarded as so many obstructions in their way; to be pushed aside, or trampled under-foot, as the case may be.

Possibly, too, they do not credit others with a greater depth of feeling than they are conscious of in themselves. Certainly, Doctor Remy, knowing nothing, by experience, of the tender and sacred associations that cluster around the home of years, was not likely to concern himself about the probable grief of Mrs. Lyte, at leaving hers, except as it might hinder or prevent her departure. For, go she must,—at least, for a time,—since Astra would not be likely to go without her. His present task was so to smooth and clear the way for them, on the one hand, while he furnished the necessary degree of motive power, on the other, that they should be gone ere Major Bergan was aware, or had submitted his terms of compromise to their consideration.

In furtherance of this design, he had tapped lightly at the door of Astra's studio, ere the sound of voices from within told him that she was not alone. Carice Bergan was with her, and both were discussing Astra's statue of clay; unto the creation of which she had lately turned—with such scanty measure of success—for distraction, if not for comfort. With a slight bow and a word of greeting to Doctor Remy, Carice went on with what she was saying, in her own singularly gentle, yet frank and fearless, fashion.

"As I said just now, it is simply wonderful, in its way; but, Astra, I don't like its way at all. The Offero (for I suppose he is not to be called Saint Christopher yet,) is much too near to falling and fainting under his burden,—"

"Perhaps he may literally do so," interrupted Astra, with a sad and bitter smile. "Nay, you need not look so startled, I only mean that I fear his supports are not strong enough; I did not realize what would be the gravitation of such a huge mass of clay. The figure is certainly settling more than I like to see."

"I did not allude to material supports," replied Carice, steadily, "but to that spiritual aid which the Christ-Child would be sure to give to one who bore Him so cheerfully and bravely as Offero did, however heavily He might be pleased to burden him. There should be more of steady hope and courage, as well as of wonder at the supernatural weight of his small burden, instead of that terrible strain and agony of effort, and that dreary, dogged sort of resolve."

"You forget," said Astra, "that he does not yet understand the nature of his burden, nor wherefore it is laid upon him;—neither," she added mournfully to herself, "neither do I."

Carice shook her head. "*You* have forgotten," she replied, "that he is not bearing the burden *for himself*, but for love of that far-off, mighty King of whom he

has heard; which feeling ought to strengthen his heart and his sinews, and shine out in his face."

Astra turned away her head. As she had unconsciously wrought her own wretched, despondent moods of the past week into the sensitive clay, so Carice's comments upon the result had their sidelong application to herself.

"As for the Christ-Child," continued Carice, raising her eyes from the Bearer to the Burden, "how did you ever get that look of immitigable fate into a child's rounded face? As a piece of work, it is almost miraculous; but, as a conception of the Christ-Child—I beg your pardon, Astra—it is absolutely dreadful."

"It may stand for Offero's idea of the face which he cannot see," suggested Astra, in a low voice.

"Well, perhaps it might, if he were thinking of the face, which I doubt. That is to say, the true Offero would be thinking of the King whom he was trying to serve, rather than the burthen that he was bearing. At any rate, it is just because he cannot see the face that he has such an idea of it. But to us, who *can* see it, it ought to show itself most benignant, most pitying, most tender and satisfying in every respect. Else, we miss the only really helpful lesson that your Offero is calculated to teach."

Astra looked at her friend half sadly, half-wonderingly. "Let no one trust your gentle, innocent look, Carice," said she; "you are a sharp-sighted critic, and as severe as you are sharp-sighted."

"On the contrary," returned Carice, "I am not criticising at all; I am merely telling you how your statue looks to me, in its unfinished condition. No doubt every stroke of that magical scraper of yours will take away something of the look which I do not like, and put in something of that which I long to see."

"I do not know," responded Astra drearily, shaking her head. "I have not your singular depth and simplicity of vision, in spiritual things."

"Nay," said Carice, "you have something more than that,—the power to create; I have only the power to discern. That cherub yonder, for instance;—I am glad that I am able to see that it is lovely beyond expression, but the power to make it so, ah! that is beyond me!"

And Carice moved away to the object of her admiration, and seemed to forget herself and all around her, in contemplating it.

Doctor Remy remained, looking critically at the clay figure.

"You have not yet said what you think of it," said Astra, turning and looking him intently in the face.

"I had nothing to say—from the spiritual side," he answered, coolly. "Miss Bergan exhausted that; besides, it is not in my line. But, if you are pleased to desire my sort of criticism, here it is. That arm is too long, and that clavicle is not sufficiently raised, and this muscle is too flat. For the rest," he added, after a slight pause, "it is a sufficiently ambitious work."

There was a touch of mockery in his tone which did not escape the sensitive ear of his listener. "You think it *too* ambitious, perhaps," she said, quietly, yet not without a keen glance at his face.

He gave the clay figure another comprehensive look; then he turned to Astra with a gentler expression than she had seen in his eyes for many days past.

"Poor child!" said he, pityingly, "what disadvantages your genius has to labor under, in this little, remote town, where you never see a work of art, nor an artist, from month's end to month's end! Why do you not go—for awhile, at least—where you can find something for your genius to feed upon? It is a law of life that there can be no good growth without proper food."

"You know," replied Astra, very gravely, "that I cannot leave my home and my mother."

"Then," returned Doctor Remy, with equal gravity, "it

would be a kindly blast—though it might not seem so, at first—that should blow you all to some point where your genius could find fuller and freer development. If such an one should ever come to you, I hope you will be able to regard it as—what Miss Bergan would doubtless call a providence.”

Carice was looking towards them, now; and his last words were spoken with a smiling glance that was apparently meant to draw her again into the conversation.

“And what would Doctor Remy call it?” she asked, but without any answering smile.

“Doctor Remy does not concern himself about names, but things,” he replied, pleasantly.

“Things answer to names,” she rejoined, quickly; “and if Doctor Remy chooses to call a providence a chance, for instance, let him not wonder if it prove a chance—to him.”

“I am afraid that I am wofully obtuse,” returned the doctor, with the air of a man who asks for a further explanation.

“From the hand of Chance,” she answered briefly, “one gets little good, and much harm; from the hand of Providence, only good, however disguised. The difference is in the taking and the using.”

She turned towards the window as she finished, with the air of one who dismisses the subject.

Astra, meanwhile, stood gazing at the doctor with a most anxious, disturbed expression. She was beginning to understand too well that under many of his seemingly most careless utterances, there lurked a deep significance and design. In the tone of his last speech to her, there had been something which caused her a vague alarm.

“What did he mean?” she asked herself, wearily putting her hand to her brow,—“What did he mean?”

VII.

OVERBURDENED.

CARICE BERGAN was gifted with instincts singularly quick and delicate. She had not long breathed the same atmosphere with Astra and Doctor Remy before she felt it growing heavy around her with some intensity of emotion which she neither shared nor understood. It might be sympathy, it might be aversion; in either case, its effect was to make her feel confused and constrained, in their presence. At one moment, she seemed to behold them afar off, as it were, in a sphere of their own, whither she had neither the right nor the ability to follow them; at another, she felt herself standing between them, barring their way to a free and satisfactory interchange of thought and feeling; and again, she believed that Doctor Remy alone was responsible for her discomfort, interrupting, by his presence, the cordial flow of sympathy between Astra and herself. At any rate, it would be a relief to escape from so oppressive an atmosphere; accordingly, she took her departure, leaving the lovers—if such they can be called—together.

Certainly, there was nothing lover-like in the manner with which they faced each other, a few moments after the door had closed behind her. That brief interval had been spent by both in preparation for the crisis which the one knew, and the other felt, to be approaching. Astra awaited it with a mixture of eagerness and dread; she was weary of wearing the checkered tissue of suspense and anxiety; she would be glad to know exactly what was in store for her, even though the bitter fruit of such knowledge should

be mortification and anguish. Doctor Remy's face was set and hard; over it a sombre emotion, like the gray shadow of a cloud on a rock, now and then passed swiftly, taking nothing from its sternness, but adding much to its gloom. He looked like a man who, at no slight cost to himself, has braced his soul with iron for the performance of some heavy, but necessary, task. Little as he likes it, he will carry it out pitilessly to the end.

With an inauspicious frown on his brow—none the less dark because it must have been assumed—he now opened the conversation by saying, abruptly;—

“Astra, I have heard some very strange rumors, of late.”

“Indeed!” she returned, with a note of disappointment, as well as of surprise, in her voice. This was but a roundabout road to explanation, she thought; it would have pleased her better had the doctor chosen a more direct one. She looked round for a chair, and sat down wearily, as if to wait his pleasure with such patience as she could command.

However, Doctor Remy was going as straight to the point—his point, at least—as could be wished. “Perhaps you will be less indifferent to these rumors,” he continued, insinuatingly, “when you understand that they concern you, and your good name, much.”

A slight flush rose to Astra's face, and her eyes lit; but she kept her seat, and she answered not a word, though Doctor Remy waited a moment, as if he expected her to speak. Seeing her silent, however, he went on, slowly, and with seeming reluctance; yet, to a keen and disinterested observer, it might have appeared that he was trying his best to provoke her.

“I once told you that it was not in my nature to trust,” said he. “But I have trusted you, Astra, even to blindness,—else I should not have been indebted to others for the first intimations of things that I ought to have seen for

myself. I should have discovered what sort of game you were playing, before the knowledge was forced upon me at the hands of public rumor. I suppose that I ought to take shame to myself for being so easily deceived;—I do,—nevertheless your shame is certainly the greater for having so deceived me.”

The flame in Astra’s eyes was kindling brightly now, and her breath came quick and short; nevertheless, it was in a tone of the coldest and quietest dignity that she answered;—

“I am not quick at reading riddles.—be so good as to tell me, plainly, what you mean.”

“As plainly as the subject allows,” returned Doctor Remy, in a tone that was in itself a taunt. ‘I mean that the names of Astra Lyte and Bergan Arling are ringing together from one end of the town to the other, in a way which, it may readily be believed, is not pleasant to my ears. It is confidently asserted—and believed—that a secret engagement exists between them. That is to say; the lady has long admitted the gentleman to a degree of daily intimacy and familiarity, which she could not with propriety have accorded to any other than her promised husband;—some say, not even to him. Mr. Arling has been observed to be in her studio for hours together; he has been seen strolling with her in the outskirts of the town; the twain have been noticed talking earnestly together in that out-of-the-way spot known as the oak amphitheatre. On all these occasions the lady has been observed to be so much the more demonstrative of the two, as to give rise to the suspicion that the gentleman’s sudden journey westward has been taken, mainly, for the purpose of freeing himself from entanglements not approved by his better judgment.”

As these atrocious sentences fell, one by one, with distinct and cutting emphasis, from Doctor Remy’s lips, Astra rose to her feet; the flush on either cheek settled into a vivid crimson spot, in the midst of a deadly pallor; her

eyes darted fire; her lips trembled with the rush of an indignation too tumultuous, as yet, for word or action. Noting these signs, Doctor Remy congratulated himself upon the successful progress of his experiment. Already, the lioness was at bay; with a little more provocation, she would think only of vengeance.

He resumed his statement. "At first, of course, I paid no attention to these rumors; my ears and eyes were closed against them by that blind, foolish trust in you, of which I have spoken. By and by, they came thicker and faster, and in a shape to compel my consideration. I began to understand that the possible heir of Bergan Hall possessed an immense advantage over the humble physician;—although it might be well to keep a hold on the latter until the former was secure, and his inheritance certain. By way of two strings to the bow, there might be two secret engagements. I commenced an investigation. I traced the reports which I have mentioned back to their source—"

"You did!" interrupted Astra, with indignation that she could no longer repress. "Instead of sending these foul slanders back down the throats which invented them, you—" She stopped, choked by her bitter sense of indignity and wrong.

"—took the pains to verify them," rejoined Doctor Remy, coolly finishing her sentence. "Every accusation was established in the mouths of several witnesses. Arling himself had spoken frankly, as well as lightly, of his engagement, to more than one person."

"It is false, and you know it!" exclaimed Astra. "Mr. Arling is incapable of such baseness."

"Never mind defending *him*," said Doctor Remy, with a curl of the lip. "What have you to say for yourself?"

Astra walked to the door, and flung it wide open. "I have *that* to say," she replied, turning upon him with a look of ineffable scorn, and a queenly gesture of dismissal. "Go!"

Doctor Remy stood for a moment irresolute, with an unwonted flush of shame rising to his brow. The climax had not only come sooner than he anticipated, but in an unexpectedly embarrassing shape,—a shape that gave him a sudden, startling perception of the vileness of the task which he had set himself to do. Naturally, he was inclined to be angry with Astra for the action to which he owed this moment of self-recognition; yet, on the whole, it was the most bewitching thing that he had ever seen her do. Never had she attracted him so strongly as while she thus stood pointing him to the door. Her free and noble attitude, the wonderful vividness of her expression, the maidenly dignity of her tacit refusal to descend for one moment to his level, and discuss with him the points that he had raised, thrilled him with involuntary admiration. It irked him to think that he must needs give her up. Was there really no way to keep her, and at the same time win Bergan Hall? He sent his thoughts back over the road which they had trodden so often, during the past fortnight, and decided once more that the risk was too great. He must persevere in the course upon which he had entered. Nor did a little present mortification matter, in comparison with hopeful progress. Astra was only helping him forward in the way that he wished to go. How easily the affections and passions of others became the puppets of his will!

Nevertheless, it was not without a softened, almost regretful, tone that he finally said,—“If I go, Astra, you understand that our engagement is at an end.”

“Our engagement!” repeated Astra, looking at him with a kind of scornful amaze. “How dare you insult me thus? I was never engaged to you,—never!”

Doctor Remy stood aghast. For one moment, he believed that her senses were taking leave of her.

“Never!” repeated Astra, with proud emphasis. “I was engaged,” she went on, after a moment, in an altered and tremulous tone, “to a MAN,—a calm, wise, noble man,

—not a monster, nor a piece of mechanism. I was engaged to an earnest seeker after truth, a courageous grappler with problems that other men shunned, an honest speaker of his own thoughts and moulder of his own opinions,—a man who, though he might be temporarily led astray by the very excess of his virtues of candor, boldness, and integrity, would be sure to come right in the end. He is dead, —or he never lived, except in my imagination,—*requiescat in pace*. But to *you*,—a body without a soul, an intellect without a heart, a will without a faith, a kind of human beast of prey, intent on nothing but the gratification of his own selfish ends,—to you I was never pledged. I would as soon have bound myself to a corpse, or a calculating machine.”

“This is plain talk, Astra,” said Dr. Remy, growing pale with anger and mortification. “If you were not a woman, it would be easier to answer it.”

“It is not only plain talk, but plain sight,” replied Astra. “The scales have fallen from my eyes; at last, I see you as you are. The most that can be said for you, as well as in excuse for my late infatuation (for I would not seem altogether despicable in my own eyes), is that great and rich capabilities have been miserably perverted, in your person. A grand soul has somehow been strangled within you. Some hidden canker—beginning I know not when nor where, but to which your surgeon’s knowledge ought to have impelled you long ago to put the surgeon’s knife—has slowly eaten out everything that was sound and good, in your moral system, and left nothing but rottenness. And it is now too late for remedy. If it were not,—if there were any hope that I could help to save you, by clinging to you,—I think I have the strength and courage to do it. As it is, I should only corrupt myself. Indeed, I fear it will be long ere I get rid of the virus of doubt and capitiousness, which, I find, you have already introduced into my mind; and of which that figure” (she pointed to the

statue of clay) "is the legitimate outcome. You have given a bias to my mode of thought, which has already shaken my faith to its foundations,—and might, in time (but for the scathing commentary of your life upon your opinions), have destroyed it. Leave me now. We have done with each other."

Perhaps Dr. Remy's good angel, absent from his side for many years, hovered, at that moment, above his head, with a wistful—almost a hopeful—face. For, at last, the strong man was visibly affected. Some chance word of Astra's had found a joint in his iron armor, and penetrated to the living flesh. His lip trembled,—it may have been with an unshaped prayer to Astra to make that effort to save him, of which she had declared herself capable,—it may have been with a sudden perception of the barrenness of his life, and the valuelessness of its ends, disposing him, for a moment, to try whether any richer realities were to be reaped from an unselfish human affection and an unquestioning heavenly faith.

But not thus easily and quickly was the whole bent of a life to be changed, not thus the holding of the cords of evil to be loosed! Suddenly, between him and Astra, rose a vision of Bergan Hall, with its immense revenues, its ancient and aristocratic *prestige*, the vast power and influence that it would impart to capable hands, the abundant means and leisure that it would allow for scientific pursuits. For, if Doctor Remy lived for anything besides himself, it was for science. He had managed to persuade himself that the interests of the two were identical. He had embodied his selfishness, as it were, in a theory; for the development, confirmation, and proclamation, of which, he believed that he desired leisure and wealth, far more than for himself; and through which he meant to be a benefactor to his race, as well as to wreath his own name with undying laurels. On the one hand, then, was this wide prospect of wealth, freedom, usefulness, and fame; on the other, Astra, and a

life of restrictions and limitations, narrowed down to the daily necessity of daily bread. Quickly he made his choice. The angel spread his white wings, and flew upward,—never to return!

Doctor Remy turned to Astra, and held out his hand. "Let us part friends," said he.

"Not so," replied Astra; "let us part—as we are to remain—strangers. No need to mock the sacred past with the commonplace civilities of ordinary intercourse. The relation that once existed between us is simply dead, not changed into something else."

"As you will," returned Doctor Remy, after a pause. "At least let me wish you a short mourning, and a bright thereafter. Adieu."

He went out as he spoke, closing the door behind him. In his excitement, he used more force than he was aware of, and it fell to with a clangor that reverberated loudly through the large, uncarpeted room, and jarred painfully upon Astra's nerves. She shivered, and her eyes fell upon the clay figure. Apparently, it was trembling with sympathetic emotion; it even bent toward her, as if suddenly endued with life; for one moment, the old fable of Pygmalion seemed coming true, in her modern experience. Then, the limbs gave way, the trunk fell forward, down went Bearer and Child together, the faces of each giving her one last, distorted look of malign meaning, ere they crushed into fragments on the platform.

"It is not the only ruin that he has left behind him," murmured Astra to herself, with a sad and bitter smile.

In another moment, she too began to sink. The long fever of suspense was ended; the excitement that had carried her through the late trying interview was over; the inevitable time of reaction and depression had come. The thought of the terrible blank left in her heart and life, of the woful loss of affection, faith, and hope, that she had suffered, of the miserable waste in her past, and of the

chaotic emptiness in her future, came over her with awful force. Slowly she sank, as if an invisible weight were pressing her to the earth. Settling upon her knees, she leaned her head on the ruins of her statue, and shook with sobs of tearless agony.

She knew not how long a time went by thus; it seemed to her to stretch its slow length over an age. But it is a merciful provision that acute sorrow soon exhausts itself. The mind, like the body, has beneficent limits to its power of endurance. In due time, Astra exchanged the anguish of wretchedness for its torpor. Her sobs died away, the convulsive trembling of her frame ceased, she sat up and looked around her with a face of quiet misery. Perhaps it was a little hard, too. Her pride was coming to her aid in bearing the burden for which, she told herself, she was largely accountable, and must therefore struggle along with as best she could. It was miraculously heavy, it would tax all her strength and resolution, she saw that plainly enough; but she forgot to look into it for any sign of divine origin, or promise of divine help. The baleful effect of Doctor Remy's influence still followed her, making God an overhanging Law, instead of a surrounding Love. She could not even read aright the lesson of her own fragments of clay!

She was struggling up to her feet, when Mrs. Lyte hurriedly entered, holding an open letter in her hand, and looking both frightened and bewildered. Perhaps nothing could have been better for either mother or daughter, at that moment, than to see the other's troubled face. In both countenances, there was a quick change of expression,—something of sorrow and anxiety gone, something of loving sympathy in its place,—as each uttered the eager inquiry;—

“What is the matter?”

Fortunately, Astra was not obliged to answer. Mrs. Lyte instantly discovered the fallen statue, and connected

it, though not without a degree of surprise, with her daughter's woe-begone face. For Astra had been wont to bear disaster with more fortitude! Still, this was the largest work that she had yet undertaken; besides, she had seemed so far from well, of late! Mrs. Lyte's heart thrilled with motherly sympathy.

"I am so sorry!" she said, pityingly. "Is it an utter ruin?"

"Utter," replied Astra, with dreary emphasis. "But never mind about it now. What has happened to distress you?"

Mrs. Lyte put the letter into Astra's hand. "Read that," said she, "and see what you can make of it."

It was not without difficulty, under the pressure of her own misery, that Astra made herself comprehend the purport of the document before her, through the disguise of the legal terms wherein it had duly been couched by the lawyer employed by Major Bergan. With enlightenment, however, strange to say, came a quick sense of relief. Here, at least, was a necessity for action; and the trouble which is attended by that, is never so great as one which calls only for patient endurance. Besides, how glad would she be to leave Berganton at this juncture, to escape at once from its curiosity, its sympathy, or its censure, to be spared the pain of meeting Doctor Remy's altered face, and the irksomeness of going on with the old life, in the old scene, after it had lost all the old color and substance. Her face brightened so much, as she looked up from the letter, that Mrs. Lyte gave a sigh of relief.

"Then it is not so bad as I thought," said she.

Astra's heart smote her for her selfishness. She reflected what grief it would cause her mother to be thrust out from the home endeared to her by so many and sacred associations. Her face fell, and her heart sank again. Covering her eyes with her hands, she burst into a sudden passion of tears,—a softer agony than had shaken her be-

fore, but still so plainly an agony disproportionate to the occasion, that Mrs. Lyte's eyes suddenly opened to the perception of some hitherto unsuspected sorrow. She put her arms round her daughter, and drew her head on to her bosom, as in the days of her childhood.

"What is it, darling?" she asked.

The soft tone, the affectionate touch, the motherly sympathy, were irresistible. Before she well knew what she was doing, Astra was pouring forth all her sad story.

"Oh, mother!" she moaned, as she finished, "if we could only go away,—just for a time, at least, until I have recovered myself a little! If we could only go at once, too, without explanations or farewells!"

"We will, my child," returned Mrs. Lyte, soothingly,—"that is, if I can manage it."

Then followed a long consultation.

VIII.

A BUSINESS LETTER.

FROM Astra's studio, Doctor Remy went to his office, and devoted an hour to the task of writing a letter ; which seemed to make an unusual demand upon his skill, either of composition or penmanship. Three different sheets were defaced and destroyed, ere the work was accomplished to his mind. The epistle was addressed to Mrs. Lyte, enclosing what purported to be the amount of an old, outlawed debt to her deceased husband ; of which the debtor, having recently met with a stroke of good fortune, was glad to relieve his conscience. In good time, after making a short *détour*, it arrived at its destination ; and played an important part in events, by furnishing Mrs. Lyte with an opportune sum of ready money.

Five days afterward, as Major Bergan was about to sally forth for his customary morning visit to his beloved rice fields, a letter was put into his hands. It ran as follows :

“DEAR MAJOR BERGAN: I duly received your notice of foreclosure, and I thank you for the measure of forbearance that you have hitherto exercised toward me. As you are doubtless aware, I have no means of paying off the mortgage, except by the sale of the property which it covers. As I am about to leave Berganton, for a time, on account of my daughter's health, I hereby surrender my house and grounds into your hands, to be sold, or otherwise disposed of, as you may deem best for our mutual interests. If they sell for more than the amount of the

mortgage (as I hope they will), I know I may safely trust to you, as a man of honor, and a good friend of my late husband, to hold the balance subject to my order. You will find the house in charge of my old and faithful servant, Cato; whom I also venture to commend to your kind care, until I shall be able to send for him. I cannot find it in my heart to sell him; besides, he is too old to be of much value, though still quite able to earn his bread, on your plantation.

"This is not a man's way of doing business, I am well aware; it is only a woman's way of shirking responsibility, in matters that she does not understand. I know that my interests are safer in your hands than in my own. As soon as I am comfortably settled anywhere, I will let you know my address. Till then, believe me,

"Very truly yours,

"CATHERINE LYTE."

It will be seen that this epistle was a masterpiece of diplomacy, in its way. Though it proved Mrs. Lyte to be a most unbusiness-like woman, it none the less evinced her thorough knowledge of the one-sided and contradictory character of the man with whom she had to deal. Grasping and impracticable as Major Bergan would be sure to be, with a surly and obstinate debtor who met him squarely on his own ground, she believed that he would not fail to show himself scrupulously just, and even generous, to the woman who, without a word of reproach or remonstrance, quietly resigned herself and her affairs into his hands, to be dealt with according to his good pleasure.

In this conclusion, she was justified by the event. A more astonished and disgusted man than Major Bergan, after he had mastered the contents of her letter, it would be hard to find. For once, even his brandy bottle was empty of comfort. He could only partially relieve his mind, while his horse was being saddled, by pouring forth

volley upon volley of curses ; distributed, impartially, at first, among Mrs. Lyte, Doctor Remy, his nephew, his frightened servants, and himself. Later, his wrath began to concentrate itself on Doctor Remy. That personage had undoubtedly influenced him to the commission of the act which he now stigmatized, in his most emphatic manner, as unworthy a Bergan and a gentleman. In return, he threatened to break every bone in the doctor's body, and grimly consigned the fragments to a place of deposit always much in favor with men of his habits. Finally, he mounted his horse, and trotted rapidly toward Berganton.

His first visit was, of course, to Doctor Remy. With the most imperturbable good humor, that gentleman listened to the flow of his oaths and objurgations, until it had partially exhausted itself by its own fury. He then assured the Major that his surprise and regret at Mrs. Lyte's departure were fully equalled by his own. The thing had been managed so quietly and adroitly, that he had not suspected it, until his attention had been attracted by the deserted look of the house. At the same time, he must acknowledge that it was only a short time since he had advised Mrs. Lyte to try a change of air, both for herself and her daughter ; and doubtless that had had its share in influencing her action. Besides, it was on the whole the best thing that she could do to take Miss Astra out of the way, until the present cloud of gossip had blown over. Finally, he threw out a suggestion that the twain had possibly gone to join Mr. Arling.

Hereupon, Major Bergan's wrath broke out afresh. It was not in human nature—certainly not in that particular species of human nature represented by the Major—to hear with equanimity that the very measure which he had taken to prevent what he considered to be an unsuitable marriage, had possibly availed to hasten it forward. The walls of the doctor's office trembled with the oral thunderbolts launched at the offenders. In due time, however, these also

subsided into the low growl of the exhausted tempest; dying away, at last, in muttered imprecations upon that curious turn of events—the grim humor of which the Major was now quite capable of appreciating—which had made him the trustee of Mrs. Lyte's affairs, and the guardian of her interests.

To the Major's credit be it spoken, that he was incapable of betraying the trust thus committed to him. Quitting Doctor Remy's office, he went in search of old Cato, put the premises in his charge during the absence of his mistress, promised him an occasional visit of inspection (and a sound thrashing if all was not found in complete order), made due provision for his maintenance, and then took himself grumblingly home, to drown the remnant of his chagrin in the Lethean glass that had already swallowed up so many of his better thoughts, impulses, and characteristics.

Of course, Mrs. Lyte's departure—or flight, as it was not infrequently termed—made the nine days' wonder of Berganton. Some few gentle, charitable souls there were, no doubt, who, judging their neighbor by themselves, saw no harm either in the fact or the manner of her going. She was ill; so was her daughter; they had neither time nor heart for leavetakings. But there were others, wise in the crooked ways of the human heart through much practice therein, who scrupled not to find motives and objects for the course of the pale-faced widow and her gifted daughter, with which it is not necessary to stain this page. There was the more room for this, inasmuch as Major Bergan, partly out of consideration for Mrs. Lyte, and partly out of shame on his own account, had taken care that the existence of the mortgage should not transpire. Yet Mrs. Lyte had depended upon the ultimate disclosure of this fact, to furnish that explanation of her departure which she had shunned to give herself, and to turn the current of popular sympathy in her favor. In yielding to Astra's morbid

desire not only to leave the scene of her untoward love behind, but to do it in such swift and silent wise that neither curiosity, nor sympathy, nor malevolence, could immediately follow them, to inflict their various torture upon her sore heart, Mrs. Lyte had looked confidently forward to this forthcoming justification of her step. Her old friends, she thought, would be sure to understand the feeling that led her to flee from the sight of the sale of her lifelong home (it might be under the auctioneer's hammer), and to shut off all means of communication between herself and the painful transaction, until time had given her strength to bear it.

Next to Major Bergan, the person who felt most aggrieved at the fact and manner of her departure was Carice. Astra, to be sure, had not failed to send her friend a brief note of farewell; but it was couched in such vague terms, owing to the confusion and distress of mind in which it had been written, as to afford little satisfaction to the reader. She could only gather from it that, in one way or another, Astra's happiness was very seriously compromised; so much so as to make a change desirable, though it were only a change of pain. And, in Carice's present circumstances, this was either too much or too little. The rumors which had filled Berganton had found their way to Oakstead also; and, for the first time in their lives, parents and daughter were divided in sentiment, and alien in sympathy. Mr. and Mrs. Bergan—terrified that their idolized child should have given her heart to a man persistently held up to view as a thin mask of outward morality over an inward rottenness of intemperance, indebtedness, and unscrupulous trifling with affection—could think of no better way of correcting the mischief than by continually repeating in her unwilling ears the various dark rumors in circulation, together with such facts and theories as tended to confirm them. Carice, on her part, turned from them all with the instinctive disgust of a pure mind, and the generous faith

and confidence of a true affection. And she was right. Trust, as long as it is in anywise possible, is the heart's deepest wisdom, as well as its surest instinct.

Nevertheless, it was hard to find her parents arrayed against her, with all the rest of the world. Duty, decorum, forbade her to set up her own opinion in opposition to theirs; often she had but to listen in silence to statements and inferences which she could neither admit nor disprove. She would have been glad, therefore, had Astra's note furnished one scrap of evidence in support of her own convictions; on the contrary, its testimony went quite the other way. She could only neutralize its effect upon herself by supposing that Astra had given her affections to Bergan unsought, and was now suffering from a disappointment none the less bitter that she had brought it upon herself. But Carice was too delicate and generous to breathe this suspicion aloud; at the same time she knew that it would have no weight with minds so deeply prejudiced as those of her parents.

Carice's worst trial was, however, her growing wonder why nothing was heard from Bergan. His last words to her had been a promise to write immediately, both to her father and herself,—to the former by way of frankly avowing his love, and asking for permission to address his daughter; to the latter, as a necessary sequence to that brief interview by the singing river, the thought of which was Carice's one subject of delightful contemplation. But no letter came, not so much as a word of regret or excuse for necessary delay. As time dragged its slow length along, a touching look of wistfulness, mingled with a sorrowful patience, came into the face that had lately been so serenely happy,—a look over which Mr. and Mrs. Bergan scarcely knew whether most to lament or to rejoice. It was grievous to behold it there; and yet, if Bergan would only keep silent, she *must* eventually give him up!

Alas for Carice! there was no doubt whatever that Ber-

gan would keep silent—or seem to do so. Her parents' minds would have been set at rest on that point, if they could invisibly have followed Doctor Remy into the Berganton Post Office some weeks previous, and listened to his conversation with the pale, slight, weak-looking young man in charge. One month before, he had so obstinately and successfully fought death at the bedside of this young man's newly wedded wife, as to call forth an unusual amount of gratitude. To this fact he now alluded.

"Well, Jekyll," said he, "I have come to make trial of that eternal gratitude which you swore to me, not long ago."

"I am glad of it, sir," responded Jekyll, warmly. "What can I do for you?"

"The question is rather, what *will* you do for me?" returned the doctor, with marked emphasis.

"Anything, anything, that is not wrong," replied Jekyll.

"Right and wrong are relative terms," replied Doctor Remy, quietly. "If you had understood the nature of the drugs which I gave your wife the other night, you would have said that I was trying to poison her;—yet, you see, I saved her life. It is the motive which determines the character of the act."

"Y-e-s, sir," rejoined Jekyll, considerably bewildered; but, nevertheless, feeling quite certain that so learned a man as Doctor Remy must understand these matters a great deal better than he did.

"And so," continued the doctor, suavely, "what I am about to ask you to do, is not really wrong, though it may seem so at first sight. It is only a quiet method of averting a great deal of trouble and scandal from a very worthy family. Should you recognize this handwriting, if you were to see it again?"

Jekyll looked at the paper held towards him, and answered,—"Yes, certainly; it is—"

"Never mind whose it is," interrupted the doctor; "it

is just as well not to know anything about that. Well, Jekyll, what I want you to do, is simply to keep a sharp lookout for any letters, in that handwriting, which may come to Godfrey Bergan, or his daughter, or his wife, and hand them over to me."

Jekyll opened his eyes wide with surprise and terror. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed, "it's a penitentiary business!"

"Not at all," replied Doctor Remy, calmly. "In the first place, no one will know anything about it but you and me. In the second, you are not doing this thing for your own advantage, but just to help me to save certain excellent people from sore sorrow and trouble."

Jekyll did not answer, but he still looked dismayed and unconvinced.

"If it will ease your scruples any," pursued the doctor, after a pause, "I don't mind telling you, in confidence, that Mr. Godfrey Bergan very much desires the suppression of these letters, though he does not want to appear in the matter himself. And you must admit that he has a right to control the correspondence of his own household.

"But why does he want his *own* letters stopped?" asked Jekyll.

"For the best of reasons,—he does not want to receive them. He prefers to be able to say that he hears nothing, and knows nothing. Therefore, you will readily understand that nothing is to be said, or even hinted, to him. He puts the matter in my hands, and you are responsible to me only."

It is unnecessary to trace the conversation to the end. Its results are already patent to the reader. Doctor Remy was specious and plausible; Jekyll was weak and grateful; the yielding of the pliant nature of the former to the stronger one of the latter, could only be a question of time.

IX.

SMOOTHER THAN BUTTER.

N^O sooner was the way made clear, by the removal of Bergan and Astra, than Doctor Remy began to visit assiduously at Oakstead ; taking good care, at first, that the object of these visits should seem to be anything but Carice. He came to discuss local politics or town hygiene with Mr. Bergan ; or he sought to interest his wife in some newly discovered object of charity. By and by, it was a mere matter of pleasant habit, apparently, that he stopped at Oakstead four or five times a week, as he came and went on his professional rounds.

If Carice was absent, on these occasions, he never asked for her ; if she was present, he rarely addressed his conversation to her ; nevertheless he weighed every word, and shaped every sentence, with artful reference to its effect upon her ear and mind. Every resource of his tact and skill was exhausted, in his effort to attract and keep the attention of the fair, silent girl, sitting in the shadow, with the drooping head, and the patient, preoccupied face.

It was long ere he could congratulate himself upon any measure of success. The little that Carice had hitherto known of Doctor Remy, she had intuitively disliked. She now acknowledged that she had scarcely done him justice in her thought ; or he had changed since then. Occasionally, in his mention of his poorer patients, there peeped out traits of thoughtful kindness and generosity,—or something that looked like them,—for which she would never have given him credit. She was glad to know that he was better than he had seemed. But here the matter ended, so far as

she was concerned. She did not care for him, personally; she shunned his visits, as much as possible; when compelled to be present, she oftenest sat a little apart, thinking her own thoughts over her embroidery or her drawing, and letting the brightest flow of his conversation pass by her unheeded.

But so consummate a social strategist as Doctor Remy was not thus to be baffled. One day, he took fitting occasion to bring Bergan's name into his talk,—speaking of him quietly and unconcernedly, as it was natural to speak of a man with whom he had been intimately associated for some months,—and speaking of him kindly, too, as of one for whom he entertained a real regard. Carice turned away her head, and tears sprang to her eyes. It was so long since she had heard Bergan's name spoken in a friendly tone, and unaccompanied by a disparaging commentary! When she ventured to look at Doctor Remy, it was with a soft, grateful expression, which he did not fail to detect and understand. There was a certain wistfulness, also, as of a flower which, having been refreshed by one little drop of unexpected dew, opens its petals for more. This, too, the doctor understood, and was too wise to disappoint.

“By the way,” said he, turning to Mr. Bergan, “perhaps I can give you the latest news from your sister,—I had a letter from Mr. Arling this morning.”

Carice's heart gave a great leap, of mingled pleasure and pain. At last she was to hear something;—yet, certainly, it ought not to be in this roundabout way.

“It will be the earliest news as well as the latest,” responded Mr. Bergan, drily; “I have heard nothing, as yet.”

“Is it possible!” exclaimed Doctor Remy, with well-feigned surprise; “I had no idea of that. Still, severe sickness is an engrossing guest in a house, as I often have occasion to notice; outside friends are apt to be forgotten,

or rather ignored, except as they can be made useful. Probably, Arling would not have written to me, if he had not wanted something supplementary to certain medical suggestions with which I furnished him, when he left, and which seem to have been of use. Anyway, I am glad to be able to tell you that the fever has passed the crisis."

"I am glad to hear it," returned Mr. Bergan, heartily enough, yet with an evident dislike of the subject. Carice being present, he could not forget that talking of Mrs. Arling was the next thing to talking of her son.

Mrs. Bergan, however, was more alive to the demands both of kinship and of courtesy. "Is our sister out of danger, then?" she asked with interest.

"Except as there is always danger of a relapse," answered Doctor Remy. "Still, judging from Mr. Arling's letter, I should say that there is good reason to hope that his mother's convalescence will be sure and swift. In that case, we may look for him back among us, ere long."

Mr. Bergan frowned; Carice turned away her face, that her gladness might not be seen shining in her eyes. This, then, was the reason why Bergan had not written to Oakstead. At first, there had been engrossing anxiety and fear; then, finding that he should soon be able to come and plead his cause in person, he had not thought it wise to commit it to the colder advocacy of a letter. There were many advantages in a face-to-face discussion; especially where, as he doubtless suspected, prejudice was to be met and overcome! And he could not honorably write to her, until he had written to her father.

Nor would she admit, even to herself, that this explanation did not quite cover every point, that it hardly excused Bergan for subjecting her to so long a strain of expectation and suspense. She was so glad, poor child! to discern even the outline of a reasonable solution of the mystery that had so oppressed her! And, for the rest, was he not coming soon, to make everything smooth and plain? Might

he not be here in a few days,—a week,—a fortnight,—at farthest? Or, suppose it should be a month:—well, no need for her heart to sink thus,—could a month ever seem long again, in comparison with that which was just past?

Perhaps it may be well to offset the foregoing scene with one or two veritable paragraphs from Bergan's letter:—

“The crisis of the fever, Doctor Trubie thinks, was passed a week ago. But my mother does not rally, in the least. We just succeed in keeping her alive—if anything so like death can be called life—by the means which you suggested. If she does live, we shall owe it, under God, to you. The great obstacle to her recovery, now, is the ulceration mentioned above; Doctor Trubie warns us that it may terminate fatally, any day. If you have any further suggestions to offer, I need not say how gratefully we shall accept them.

“Can you tell me if they are all well at Oakstead? I wrote some time ago, but have heard nothing.”

The second of these paragraphs, Doctor Remy had dismissed with a single reading and a sinister smile; but, over the first, he had knitted his brows into their sternest, deepest lines of thought,—the look of a man hurling all his reserved force into the fight, and determined to wring victory from defeat.

“She must not die!” he muttered to himself,—“that would set Arling free too soon. The longer and slower her convalescence, the better,—but she *must not die!*”

And the return mail carried back to Mrs. Arling's bedside—where the battle seemed wellnigh over—the strong reinforcements of Doctor Remy's science and experience, to carry on the fight.

From all of which, it will easily be seen that Carice's days of suspense were not yet over. Doctor Remy had artfully lifted her a little way into the sunshine, first, as a

means of commending himself to her favor, and next, in order that her lapse into the shadow should be the more complete.

In the first of these objects, he was measurably successful. Carice no longer shunned him. He was certain to see her, soon or late, whenever he came to Oakstead. With the current of feeling setting so strongly against Bergan, in every other quarter, she could not afford to lose any kindly mention of him, in this one. Though she still sat a little apart, it was plain that she lost no word of his conversation. Her face, as she listened, had the same look of patient interest, with which a solitary prisoner might watch for the flight of a bird across the small square of blue sky which is his only prospect.

Her parents noticed the change, and rejoiced in it, inasmuch as they did not suspect its cause. For it must be confessed that Doctor Remy acquitted himself marvellously well of the delicate task of mentioning Bergan in terms at once pleasant to the daughter's ears, and void of offence to those of the parents. He understood perfectly the art of constructing two-sided sentences, which gave Carice the impression that he was the young man's stanch, if undemonstrative, friend, at the same time that Mr. and Mrs. Bergan found in them abundant confirmation of their prejudices.

Of course, neither party discussed these impressions with the other. Carice, feeling the uselessness of the task, had long since ceased to defend Bergan; her parents, believing that his silence was operating more powerfully against him than any arguments of theirs could do, had ceased to attack him. Nor will it seem any paradox to say that, while they were unspeakably glad of his omission to write, it was, on the whole, his worst fault, in their eyes. They resented the slight to their daughter none the less, because it hastened the end which they ardently desired. To have sought her love was bad enough, but to have flung

it aside so quickly, as a thing of no value, was a thousand times worse. Godfrey Bergan gnashed his teeth, whenever he thought of it, with an indignation for which he had no words.

One day, Doctor Remy, to his great gratification, found Carice alone in the library; and at once seized upon the opportunity to speak of Bergan, in kinder and fuller strain than he had ever yet ventured to do,—though not in a way to suggest that he was aware of any special bond between his listener and his subject. He described his first meeting with the young man, and its immediate results; he sketched various pleasant scenes and incidents that had come to pass under Mrs. Lyte's kindly roof; and he dwelt with hearty admiration upon Bergan's oratorical and intellectual gifts. Carice listened like one entranced. Her joy was too perfect to admit of any alloy, even when Doctor Remy went on to speak of Bergan as a young man whose character was still in process of formation, whose talents were, as yet, far in advance of his judgment, and whose kindly impulses often led him into error. Yet these few words, of all that had ever been spoken disparagingly of Bergan, in her hearing, were the only ones that had yet effected any lodgment in her mind. So artfully thrown in, among much that was friendly and encomiastic, as to be scarcely noticed at the moment, the time came when these words shot up, in Carice's memory, into manifold thorn-branches of suggestion.

At present, however, she was inexpressibly cheered by this hour's talk on the subject that lay nearest her heart. She greeted her parents, upon their return, with a face so much more like that which had once been the sunshine of their hearts, that they exchanged looks of surprise and delight. They were looks of questioning too. Was this pleasant change owing to Doctor Remy's influence? Was he beginning to think of Carice, in lover's wise? Was she beginning to turn unconsciously from the love that had

failed her, to the calm and mature affection that was certain to stand by her? Then, by all means, let the matter so arrange itself. Though Doctor Remy was not quite the man whom they would have chosen for Carice, he was infinitely better and safer than their nephew. His reputation was fair, his talents undeniable; he was certain to win eminence in his profession; and possibly, fame beyond it, as a man of science. If he had seemed a little cold and hard, hitherto, love would soften him. Who could be otherwise than soft to Carice!

And so, Doctor Remy came and went, and unlimited opportunities were given him to talk to Carice,—of Bergan, or of anything else,—of which he failed not to make artful use, with reference both to the present and the future. In due time, she came to look upon him somewhat as Astra had once done,—as a man more wise and calm than tender, more just than genial, but a man to be greatly esteemed and trusted, nevertheless; and, certainly a true, if not an enthusiastic, friend of Bergan. Yet she never thought of him, strange to say, as a friend to herself. Her instincts were far too fine and clear for that. If ever, for a moment, she felt inclined to turn to him for sympathy, she immediately shrank back from him, as powerless to give her what she sought. It was precisely the same feeling—though she did not recognize it as such—with which she would have turned away from an image in a mirror, which, during a single illusive moment of twilight, she had mistaken for a living form.

And the days came and went, and another month drew nigh its close.

X.

A WICKED DEVICE.

CARICE was strolling languidly along the bank of the creek, the heaviness of her heart easily discoverable in her absent face and languid step. Her eyes rested on the same stream, her ears were filled with the murmur of the same leaves, which had witnessed her parting with Bergan, nearly two months before, yet neither made any distinct impression on her mind; she saw and heard but the flow and murmur of her own troubled thoughts. She had noticed a singular change of tone in Doctor Remy, of late, with respect to Bergan. He no longer made the young man the subject of free and frank conversation; if obliged to mention him at all, he did it with a certain reserve and caution, an air of picking and choosing his phrases, which at first puzzled, and was now beginning to alarm, the poor girl, already worn and nervous with the long sickness of hope deferred.

Her fears, however, took a different direction from what Doctor Remy had anticipated. He had intended his alteration of manner to suggest the grave, stern reserve of a man, who, though he had himself lost confidence in his friend, is still honorably reluctant to injure him in the estimation of another. But from any such suggestion, Carice's mind was shielded by her loyal faith in her lover, as by an armor of proof. Dr. Remy's change of manner only served to strengthen her growing conviction that Bergan's failure either to write, or to appear in person, could be caused by nothing short of some great and unexpected calamity. As her eyes followed a swift cloud-shadow from object to

object of the summer landscape, so her mind followed the dark shade of her fears from point to point of possible ill. Perhaps the fever, quitting his mother, had fastened upon Bergen himself ; perhaps he was ill, suffering, unconscious, dying, even, or—the thought shook her like a sudden blow—dead ! Gasping for breath, she leaned against a friendly tree, and closed her eyes, as if to shut out the agonizing vision, which, nevertheless, rose but the more vividly before her. Quickly opening them again, she saw Doctor Remy coming toward her from the direction of the cottage. He had espied her from the piazza, as he was taking his leave, after having spent a half-hour with her mother.

She was glad to see him. He could set her free from the intolerable chafing of suspense, though it were but to hand her over to the chill bondage of despair. He would doubtless have done so, ere this, but for some request or warning of her parents to the contrary. How far this might have let him into the secret of her relations with Bergen, she knew not,—neither did she care much, just now ; how far it might avail to close his lips was a much more important consideration,—still she believed that she could gather something from the expression of his face, even though he should think it right to evade her questions.

She seized upon the first opportunity, therefore, to look him steadily in the face, though her own flushed a little, as she did so ; and to ask, quietly,—“Have you heard anything from my cousin Bergen lately ? ”

Doctor Remy's face underwent a quick change of expression, none the less effective that it was obedient to his will. “Yes,” replied he, sombrely, “I had a letter from him two or three days ago.”

Carice could scarcely restrain a cry of joy ; it was such a relief to know that Bergen was alive, and able to write. But her immediate perception that something was kept back, saved her self-possession.

"And my aunt," she went on, as soon as she could command her voice, "is she quite recovered?"

"Yes,—that is, I inferred so."

Carice looked a little surprised. It would seem that Bergan's letter had made no mention of his mother. "Has the fever attacked any of the others?" she continued.

"None."

"And Bergan is quite well himself?"

"He says nothing to the contrary."

Satisfactory as were these replies, in substance, there was a degree of dryness and brevity about them which was far otherwise. Unwilling to quit the subject thus, Carice ventured another query:—"Then, I suppose he may be expected back very soon?"

Doctor Remy looked grave even to sternness. "No, I think not."

Carice's heart sank. "Did he not say when he should come?" asked she, anxiously.

Doctor Remy seemed to become suddenly aware that she really had something more than a conventional interest in the subject, and to be willing to gratify it, to the best of his ability.

"I forget exactly what he said about it," replied he, "but I think I have his letter in my pocket-book." He drew forth a closely written sheet, and glanced rapidly over it, but seemed not to find what he sought. Applying again to the envelope, he produced a separate bit of paper. "Ah, yes, here we have it, in this slip of a postscript," he went on,—"'In order to '—um—um—'I think I shall postpone my return until after Christmas.' That is all."

Carice stood as in a dream. Bergan well! Bergan silent only to her! Bergan not coming back for three months yet!—her mind utterly refused to receive three such incongruous ideas. There must be some miserable mistake,—but where? She put her hand to her brow with a piteous gesture of perplexity and bewilderment.

Doctor Remy, meanwhile, failed not to observe the effect of his words, though apparently thinking only of refolding and rearranging his papers. It was precisely what he had expected; and, feeling quite secure, for the moment, from Carice's observation, he took occasion, as he returned Bergan's letter to his pocket-book, to let the postscript drop to the ground, taking care to conceal it with his foot during the remainder of his stay, which he wisely made short.

"Can I do anything more for you?" he asked, graciously, as he put up his pocket-book.

Carice gave a slight start, and turned toward him, with an inquiring look. She had heard, but she had not understood. He repeated his question.

"No, thank you," replied Carice, letting her eyes go back to the far, dark line of the pine forest.

"Then I must leave you. I only stopped to say good morning and good-bye. I had already spent my few moments of leisure with Mrs. Bergan."

He raised his hat courteously, and was gone.

Carice remained, trying her best to reduce the confusion of her mind to order, and, especially, to discover some clue to the mystery of Bergan's doings and intentions. She gave up the difficult task, at last, with a weary little shake of the head, and a smile of pity at her own helplessness.

"It is too deep for me," she said to herself, "but Bergan will be sure to explain it all. I must just go on trusting till he comes, or writes. He shall never be able to say that my faith in him was conquered by the first difficulty!"

There was something quieting and strengthening in the mere resolve. Trust has its own special delight,—a far subtler and sweeter thing than any satisfaction of the understanding. Carice's face was almost bright, as she turned to go home.

A folded paper lay directly in her path. Mechanically

she picked it up; mechanically she read it almost through, before her mind, busy with other thoughts, began, even vaguely, to grasp its meaning.

It ran thus:—

“P. S. I cannot understand how my foolish engagement to Astra Lyte should have leaked out. With all due respect for your opinion, I cannot think of fulfilling it; indeed, I wrote to break it off immediately after coming home. I should never have entered into it, but for a mistaken notion that it would advance my interests in a certain quarter. Finding that it was likely to do just the opposite, there was nothing for it but to take the shortest cut out of the scrape. Never fear for Astra, she does not belong to the Ophelia order of women, she has pride and pluck enough to carry her through a worse disappointment; besides, hearts are never broken except in novels and plays. I am much obliged to her for leaving Berganton, the affair will blow over the sooner. In order to give it time to do so, I think I shall postpone my return until after Christmas. Yours, B. A.”

Twice did Carice read the paper's contents through, before she began to understand what it was, and whence it came. She had seen Bergan's handwriting a few times, in notes addressed to her mother; and she remembered enough of its peculiarities to recognize them in the lines before her, as soon as her mind was able to grasp the fact that, in this heartless production, she beheld the postscript which she had seen in Doctor Remy's hand, and which he had doubtless dropped accidentally, while replacing his papers in his pocket-book. That it should have been deliberately forged, and designedly put in her way—a sort of moral torpedo, loaded with mischief—was a depth of wickedness, of which, in her innocence, she could never have conceived. She could scarcely make herself comprehend the evil tenor of the words before her eyes. She

read them over again, with a feeling that either their form or their purport *must* change, if she only studied them carefully enough; it was impossible that she had read them aright.

No, they would not alter. Her efforts only served to brand them more deeply on her mind. She looked up, at last, with a kind of wonder that the earth was still firm under her feet, and the sky's arch entire above her head. It would have seemed more in keeping to have beheld the universe crashing backward into chaos.

Not that she suffered very keenly yet. She was too much stunned to realize the extent of her wounds and bruises. She picked herself up, as it were, after the fall and the shock, and walked mechanically homeward. Her strength did not give way until she found herself in her room, shutting her door behind her, and felt what a different being had gone out of it only a little while before.

An hour after, Mrs. Bergan found her lying on her bed, white and still, more like a corpse than a living, suffering girl.

"Carice!" she cried, appalled, but not without an intuitive perception of the truth,—“Carice, my child! what is the matter?”

“I don't know—don't ask me,” replied Carice, turning her face to the wall.

Mrs. Bergan burst into tears, and stole softly away. Here was a grief in which even she could only intermeddle as a stranger. She could simply commend her child to tenderer, wiser hands than hers.

A day or two went by, and Carice was down-stairs again, white; still, patient; filling her old place, and doing her old tasks, with a sad composure that was more affecting than any abandonment of sorrow. Her woe seemed to take the form of torpor, rather than of anguish. It was that chill and heavy misery, that dismal realization of the

actual presence and power of evil in the world, which never comes to us except through the sin of some cherished, trusted friend; standing hitherto as the representative of all that is good and true, the earthly type of the Divine perfection. Falling, he falls not alone, but drags down with him the supports of every earthly confidence, and even makes the foundation of our heavenly faith to tremble. Such grief is dumb and tearless; it coils itself round the heart in cold, serpent-like folds, chilling the blood, and oppressing the breath; but it makes no single, special wound, to call forth cries and sobs of pain.

Meanwhile, the yellow fever, as foreseen long ago by Doctor Remy, made its silent entry into Berganton. One day a single case was reported in the outskirts of the town; another week, and there was scarcely a threshold which it had not crossed, either to strike or slay. The town put on sackcloth and ashes; business was suspended, except the business of nursing the sick and burying the dead; the streets were deserted, except by hearses and doctors. Or, it would be truer to say, *a* doctor; for Doctor Gerrish, being unacclimated, was one of the earliest patients; and Doctor Harris, being old and infirm, quickly sank exhausted; so Doctor Remy was soon left to face the pestilence alone, and multiply himself as best he could, to meet the demands of a whole people.

Let us do him ample justice. All that an iron frame, a steady courage, admirable executive ability, profound medical skill, and deep scientific interest, could prompt or do, he did. He organized and instructed a corps of nurses, and made them do effective work; he scattered printed suggestions and directions broadcast over the town, for the behoof of sick and well; he was himself constantly in the thickest of the fight, animating the workers, cheering the sick, wellnigh raising the dead,—doing everything but comfort the mourners, for that he had neither time nor talent. The town rang with praises of his energy and

skill; his presence had brought back hope to many a house whence it seemed to have flown forever, joy into many a heart that had only made itself ready for sorrow. Even Carice, as her private grief half-sank, for the time, under the great wave of public calamity, was moved to a degree of respect and admiration for the doctor, of which, two or three weeks before, she could not have believed herself capable. There was still a hero, and room for heroism, in the world!

By and by, Mr. Bergan fell ill, not of the fever, but of one of the sympathetic diseases, which often go hand in hand with it. There were a few days of intense anxiety, during which the wife and daughter lived, as it were, on the words of Doctor Remy's mouth, and the look of his eyes. After these came slow weeks of convalescence, of exacting feebleness and irritable complaint.

It was during these that Doctor Remy spoke.

Is it necessary to describe the conflict, or designate the result? On the one side were parental wisdom, love, and authority, with the strong sanction of recent danger and present feebleness; on the other, filial respect, affection, and obedience, and a great self-distrust. For Carice remembered that she had taken her own way before, and whither it had led; now, ought she not to submit to the guidance ordained of God?

October found her bound fast by a promise, held irrevocably to a day. The outward conflict was over; but the inward struggle, she found, was scarce begun! Under that, she paled and wasted; sleep and appetite forsook her; her eyes grew to have the pathetic, pleading look of a dumb animal taken in a net. Finally, worn-out nature took refuge in apathy that nothing seemed to disturb.

XI.

A CLUE.

A CHILL November day was drawing near its close. With the evening dusk snowflakes filled the air, and began to whiten the swells and slopes of the Arling farm, and lay the foundation of future drifts beside the doorstep and under the eaves of the Arling homestead. This structure had begun life as a log cabin, but had grown, by the simple and natural process of adding on a room or a wing, as fast as it was required and could be afforded, into a large, and somewhat picturesque, cluster of roofs and gables; beneath which there might easily be not only room for the fullest, heartiest flow of domestic and social life, but also means and influences to a considerable degree of refinement and culture.

Toward it, a stout, broad-shouldered personage was making his way, through the dusk and the snow, with a cheery face and an energetic tread, that plainly minded neither. Tramp, tramp, went the brisk footfalls up the gravel walk, the bright brass knocker was made to send a note of warning through the house, and the wayfarer admitted himself into a lighted hall, through which he strode to the open door of the sitting-room at the farther end.

A pleasant family picture was before him. Bergan Arling, on one side of the crimson-covered centre-table, looked up, smiling, from the book out of which he had been reading aloud. Two of his sisters sat near him, busy with crotchet needles and bright worsteds. Still another was drawing at a side-table; and over her, giving her the benefit of his criticism, leaned her brother Hubert, scarce two

years younger than Bergan, and so strikingly like him, that one was often taken for the other, outside the family circle. At one side of the fire-place sat the master of the house, a tall, noble-looking man, with eye undimmed and hair unfrosted by the snows of over sixty years. Opposite him was the home's true light and centre, the house-mother. She reclined in a large, low easy chair, the paleness on her face half concealed by the glow of the blazing fire, and her eyes shining with that tender joy and peace which convalescents sometimes bring back from the edge of the grave,—a reflection, perhaps, from the paradise that was already opening before the gaze of the half-freed spirit.

Doctor Trubie paused for a moment in the doorway, to master the details of the scene. He has changed but little since he was introduced to the reader, fourteen years ago, in his medical Alma Mater. His figure has gained in breadth and strength, and his features in character, but it is the same frank, genial face, and the same good-humored smile. No one that knew him then, could fail to recognize him now.

In a moment, he caught sight of Mrs. Arling, and hastened toward her with outstretched hand. "I don't know whether to congratulate or to scold you," he began, smiling, yet shaking his head with mild disapproval.

Hubert Arling came forward to Bergan's side. "I can settle the question for you," said he. "Congratulate her, and scold us. We brought her down, chair and all; she did not touch foot to the floor in the transit."

"Then I will save my scolding until it is needed. It seems little less than miraculous to see you here," he went on, turning to Mrs. Arling, "when I think how things seemed to be going, a few weeks ago. It has been a hard pull, and a long one."

"And a strong one, and a pull altogether," added Hubert Arling, merrily, by way of arresting the tears that he saw starting into his sisters' eyes.

"The strong pull," remarked Doctor Trubie, "came from my medical brother, down South."

"You underrate yourself," replied Mr. Arling. "Of what avail would Doctor Remy's suggestions have been, without your indefatigable vigilance, and your professional skill and knowledge to carry them out?"

"That is to say," returned Doctor Trubie, "that a good commander-in-chief can do nothing without good generals. At all events, Doctor Remy is a wonderfully talented fellow. He seems to keep not only abreast of medical science, but in advance of it. That very suggestion of his, which proved most valuable to us, was mentioned in my last medical review, as the latest discovery at Paris. There is something about his bold, yet scientific mode of reasoning which reminds me strangely of an old fellow-student. But Doctor Remy, I hope, is a better fellow than *he* was. By the way," he added, turning to Bergan, "I came near forgetting that I have brought you a letter from him, as I judge from the handwriting."

Bergan tore open the letter, and with an apologetic bow to the company, began eagerly to read it. Doctor Trubie seated himself by the table, picked up the rejected envelope, and gave it a critical examination.

"That's what I call a good hand," said he, "a round, clear, energetic hand, that neither tries your eyesight, nor rouses your distrust. There is no crookedness nor meanness in it; yet there is plenty of character; one can see, at a glance, that the writer is bold and sagacious as well as profound, a man of action as well as a man of science."

Bergan had finished the letter, which was short; and he now looked up with a much amused face. "I ought to tell you," said he, "that Doctor Remy possesses the rare accomplishment of being able to write with either hand; he uses the right or the left, at pleasure. But the two writings are entirely distinct. That address was written with his left hand, and so, I remember, were the sugges-

tions and prescriptions that I handed over to you. But this letter was written with his right hand ; see what you can make of it," and Bergan pushed the open sheet across the table.

The change in Doctor Trubie's face was startling. "This !" he exclaimed, his voice trembling with excitement, "who did you say wrote this ?"

"Doctor Remy, the same man who wrote that address."

Doctor Trubie glanced back at the letter, and his eyes lit with a strange, stern joy. "At last !" he muttered through his set teeth.

Mrs. Arling leaned forward, and her face grew pale. "What is it, doctor ?" she asked, trembling. "What is the matter ?"

Doctor Trubie glanced at her excited face, and saw what mischief he was doing. "Nothing," he hastened to answer, "nothing, only an old sore pressed on suddenly. This handwriting reminds me of one that—I never expected to see again."

He gave the letter a long, moody look, then refolded it, and handed it back to Bergan.

Mrs. Arling looked anxiously at her son. "Does Doctor Remy give you any special news ?" she asked.

"Not much. Uncle Godfrey is better, and the fever is over. Business is still dull."

"Then you will not need to hurry back ?"

Bergan knelt by his mother's side. "My dear mother," he whispered, "you know it is not for the sake of my business that I am anxious to return, as soon as I may. I must see Carice, and satisfy myself that nothing is amiss."

Mrs. Arling smiled, yet she sighed, too. "Ah, yes, I remember," said she, "and you are quite right."

Doctor Trubie rose, and came to the other side of Mrs. Arling's chair. "I am glad to see that I am not wanted here any longer," he began, pleasantly ;—

"But you are wanted," interrupted Mrs. Arling; "you are always wanted, as a friend."

"Thank you; but I am wanted elsewhere as a physician; so I must take my leave, for the present."

He shook hands with Mrs. Arling, and gave Bergan a meaning glance, as he did so. The young man rose. "I will walk a little way with you, if you like," said he. "I have a boyish delight in the first snow, and I did not see any last winter, you remember."

The two gentlemen were hardly outside the gate, before Doctor Trubie asked;—"What do you know of this Doctor Remy's antecedents?"

Bergan narrated the facts which he had gathered, from time to time, from Doctor Remy's conversation.

"So, he would have us believe," said Doctor Trubie, contemptuously, "that he transformed himself from a poor lawyer into a scientific physician, in a year and a half, by the help of a friendly doctor, and a course of lectures! There is falsehood on the face of it."

"He had a genius for the study," replied Bergan.

"Aye, I'll warrant! that is the saving grain of truth in the whole story. Do you remember the circumstances of your elder brother's death?"

"Not very distinctly. I was so young, at the time; and then, you know, mother could never bear to hear any allusion to them."

"You know that he was murdered?"

Bergan looked surprised. "I know there was talk of suicide," said he, "but I thought it was decided that he was poisoned by mistake."

"He was murdered," asserted Doctor Trubie, setting his teeth, "foully murdered by the man who professed to be his friend,—a man who wrote a hand as much like this Doctor Remy's as one side of your face is like the other. I charged him with it, at the time, and I have always believed that I should live to see the charge proven." And

he finished by giving a succinct account of the circumstances attending Alec Arling's death.

Bergan listened attentively and critically, as became his legal training. "I do not understand why the finding of the diamond was such conclusive evidence of guilt," said he, when the doctor paused.

"Because Roath swore, at the inquest, that he did not touch either bottle or glass, and did not even go to that end of the table. That was where he overreached himself; without that, the stone in the glass would not have been such a damning circumstance. He recognized it as such himself;—else why did he fly?"

"Well, you may be right about the murder," said Bergan, after a little consideration, "but I think you have mistaken the man."

"Let us see," said Doctor Trubie. "He is about my height?"

"Yes,—perhaps a little taller.

"He stoops a little?"

"Not at all, he is uncommonly erect."

"He has dark hair?"

"It may have been so, it is prematurely gray."

Doctor Trubie looked a little discomfited. "Give me a sketch of his character," said he.

Bergan hesitated. It was a difficult thing to do, on the instant. His impressions of Doctor Remy's character had varied, as he remembered.

"On second thought," said Doctor Trubie, "I will give you one. All of him, that is not intellect, is ice. In religious matters, he is an utter sceptic. Socially, he is brilliant; but he has no intimate friends, and he makes no confidants. Men and women, to him, are subjects of study, not objects of affection. He cares for nothing but himself and his profession. And no one cares for him—much. They may admire, but they cannot love."

Bergan looked considerably startled. "Your sketch

tallies well with some impressions of mine, which I did my best to rid myself of," said he. "But Doctor Remy has befriended me, from the first, and you yourself say that he has been largely the means of saving my mother's life."

"He has had his own reasons for both; Edmund Roath never did anything without a reason, and a selfish one. Has he anything to gain by keeping you out of the way?"

"Nothing, that I can imagine."

"When do you return to Berganton?"

"Mother has consented that I shall start on Monday, if she is no worse."

"She will be much better. Do not delay longer than that. I will accompany you; I want to see this Doctor Remy. Seeing is believing. But, mind, not a word of my coming, to him or any one else. Now, go back to your mother, or she will be alarmed. Good night."

Bergan walked back slowly and thoughtfully. Without being fully convinced of the truth of Doctor Trubie's suspicions, he was strangely disturbed and startled. Reaching the gate, he turned his face south-eastward, and gazed across the white meadows, toward the dim outline of the distant hills. His thoughts overleaped even that far barrier, and took an air line to Oakstead and to Carice. Her face rose vividly before him, not, strange to say, as he had seen it last, rosy and bright, but pale and piteous, and gazing toward him with a look that besought sympathy and succor, plainer than any speech. His eyes grew moist, his breath tremulous; his heart swelled with passionate love and longing.

"I will beg my mother to consent to my going at once," said he to himself. "I cannot wait another day."

The next afternoon, he was on his way to Berganton, whither Doctor Trubie was shortly to follow him.

XII.

TOO LATE.

IN those days, there was a pleasant spice of uncertainty about Southern journeyings. Cars, steamboats, and stages ran in happy independence of each other and the time-table. The traveller never knew at what point of juniper swamp, or pine barren, or cotton plantation, he would be set down to while away some hours in botanical or ethnological investigations, if his mind were sufficiently at ease, or in chewing the bitter cud of impatience, if it were not. Defective machinery and lazy officials labored mightily together to miss connections, and wherever human inefficiency came short, down swept a hurricane from the skies, and strewn the roads with prostrate trunks of trees, through which the cumbrous stage coach had literally to hew its path.

More than one such delay attended Bergan's progress southward. Under their teasing friction, the shadowy anxiety with which he had set out, increased to a positive weight of alarm. Reaching Savalla on the twelfth evening, he stopped neither for rest nor refreshment, but looked up a horse, flung himself into the saddle, and set off toward Berganton at a rapid rate. Outside the city limits, however, he was forced to slacken his pace. The night was dark, no faintest gleam of moon or star tempered the black obscurity of the tree-arched and swamp-bordered road. Compelled thus to feel his way, as it were, it was near midnight when he came upon the outlying fields of Oakstead. Reluctantly he told himself that an interview with Carice, to-night, was out of the question ; she and all the house-

hold were certain to be fast asleep, it was doubtful if even the faintest outline of the darkened dwelling would be discernible through the murky night. He had no choice but to ride on to Berganton.

Scarcely had he reached this conclusion, when a radiant window shone vision-like through the trees ; a little farther on, and the cottage, though yet distant, came full into view through an opening in the forest, brilliantly illuminated from roof to foundation as for a festivity of no ordinary magnitude. Even the surrounding lawn was lighted up into the semblance of day ; and in its remotest corner, a group of negroes, dancing to some strain of music inaudible to the wondering spectator, looked fantastic enough for the unsubstantial images of a dream.

For a moment or two, Bergan suspected his jaded senses of playing him false, as a step preparatory to taking leave of him altogether. There was something too incongruous to be real, between this gay scene of festivity and the picture presented by Doctor Remy's last letter,—a dull, silent house, its master a feeble, exacting convalescent, its mistress and daughter worn out with anxiety and watching. An intuition of some unlooked-for calamity seized him. Putting spurs to his horse, he dashed over the mile that intervened between him and the cottage, at a scarcely less furious rate than that with which Vic had borne him over the same road—how well he remembered it !—just one year ago. He did not suspect that he was now to taste the bitterest consequences of that ride.

In a very few moments, he rode through the open gates of Oakstead. Here, he found the avenue to the house encumbered with teams and saddle-horses, tied to every tree and post. The every-day aspect of these sleepy animals was like a bucket of cold water to his excited imagination. Strains of dancing music, too, came to his ear,—flutes and violins, none too well played, sent forth the notes of a popular air. Plainly, he had been a fool to connect

the thought of calamity with anything so exceedingly common-place as an evening party. If Godfrey Bergan chose to call in his friends and neighbors to dance over his restoration to health, who should gainsay him? Convalescents had their fancies, and must be humored.

In this cooler frame of mind, it naturally occurred to Bergan that he was in no fit condition to face a festal throng. His appearance, thus way-worn and travel-stained, would be scarcely more timely than that of the Ancient Mariner to the wedding guest. It would look as if he, too, had a tale of horror to impart, and Carice might be unpleasantly startled,—Carice, who little imagined him so near to her! At the thought, a strange, indefinable thrill and shiver passed over him, hard to define as either pleasure or pain.

After a moment's consideration, he dismounted, and walked quietly round to the spot where the negroes still kept up their lively dance. One of them, Bruno by name, stood a little apart, a smiling spectator of the merriment that he was too old to join. It was easy to touch him on the shoulder, without attracting the notice of the rest. The negro turned, and instantly recognized Bergan; but his exclamation of surprise was cut short by the young man's significant gesture, and he silently followed him to a spot equi-distant between the cottage and the dancers.

"All well, Bruno?" was Bergan's first inquiry.

"All bery well, Massa Arling. You's welcome back, sah. But I'se sorry you's too late for de weddin'."

The *wedding*,—the word fell almost meaninglessly on Bergan's ear, so intent was he upon satisfying himself that his late anxieties had been groundless. "And Miss Carice," he went on, "is she quite well, too?"

Bruno smiled. "Yes, massa, I'spec so, tho' she do look mighty pale and peaked, dese yere last weeks. But dey mostly look so, at sich times, I s'pose. She'll be better when de weddin's ober, an' all de fuss and flurry."

This second mention of "the wedding" penetrated to

Bergan's understanding, and awakened a faint emotion of surprise.

"The wedding!—whose wedding?" he asked.

Bruno opened his eyes wide in astonishment. "Why, don' you know, sah? I thought you'd come on purpose. Miss Carice's weddin', to be sure."

It was Bergan's turn to look more than astonished, confounded. "Miss Carice's wedding!" he repeated, as doubting the trustworthiness of his own ears.

"Yes, sah, to Doctor Remy, sah. Dey had—"

Bruno stopped short in alarm. Bergan's face had grown deadly pale, his blank stare was that of a man who neither saw nor heard. For a few merciful moments, he was simply stunned with the suddenness and severity of the shock. Too soon his benumbed senses began to revive, he put his hand to his head, where a dull, heavy pain was beginning to make itself felt; mechanically he sat down on the grass, and his breath came hard like that of a man stricken with apoplexy.

With a delicacy not uncommon in his race, Bruno turned his eyes away. A trusted servant of the household, he had seen Bergan and Carice together enough to be able to divine something of the state of the case.

Slowly, one by one, Bergan's thoughts came out of chaos, and ranged themselves into something like order. This, then, was the reason why Doctor Remy had so persistently discouraged his earlier return to Berganton, and allayed his anxiety with plausible statements respecting Carice and her father,—that he might supplant him in her affections. But why? It must be taken as evidence that he had estimated the doctor's character more correctly than he knew, that it never once occurred to him as possible that love for Carice had been the doctor's motive; yet, considered solely as holding the reversion of the Oakstead estate, her hand was scarcely worth the labor and treachery it had cost.

There was so little to reward investigation in this direction, that Bergan's thoughts came back to his own blighted hopes, and here he was pierced with the sharpest pain that he had yet felt. The treachery of the doctor was as nothing to the faithlessness of Carice. Two months,—yea, two days ago, he would have staked all his hopes for time and eternity on her truth. Fair and delicate as was the cast of her beauty, and sweet and gentle as was her manner, there had always been a certain quiet steadfastness about her, which was one of her most potent charms. All hearts felt intuitively that they might safely trust in her. What subtle or powerful influence could have been brought to bear upon her, to make her so belie herself!

He looked up. "Bruno, how long has this been going on?"

The negro did not quite understand, but made shift to guess what was meant.

"De engagement, sah? since October, I b'lieve."

"And how long has Doctor Remy visited here?"

"Oh, a good while, 'bout eber since you went away. But after massa was took sick, he come oftener, ob course—ebery day, sometimes two, tree times a day. Massa got so—'pendent on him, like, he couldn't bear to have him out ob de house, one time."

Bergan fell into thought again. He began dimly to understand something of the sort of pressure to which Carice had been subjected, and the motives that had governed her,—not that he held her exonerated, by any means—only she was a little less culpable than she had seemed, at first. But if she had sinned, poor child! how miserably she would be punished! What a sterile soil, what a chill, unfriendly climate, awaited this delicate flower, in Doctor Remy's hands! It was as if a lily should think to root itself in a rock, or a rose expect to bud and blossom on an iceberg. Besides—why had he not thought of it before?—to-morrow, perhaps, in two or three days, at farthest,

Doctor Trubie would be here, with authority, if it seemed good to him, to take this man, *her husband*, into custody as a murderer!

Bergan's was the fine, strong temperament, which rises to the greatness of a crisis. With the necessity of action, the chaos of his mind began to clear itself. "Bruno," he asked, suddenly, "does—Miss Carice love this man?"

Bruno looked surprised, as well he might, at the question; but there was something in Bergan's tone that made him answer at once, and frankly; "I don' know,—de servants do say she done it to please her father."

Bergan laid his hand impressively on the old negro's shoulder. "Bruno, I must see her at once. Her happiness—more than her happiness, the honor and peace of the whole family—is at stake. Find some way to let her know, quietly, that I am here, and that I *must* see her for one moment. Hurry! there's no time to waste."

Bruno was so thoroughly mastered by Bergan's earnestness, that he started swiftly toward the cottage, without a word. As he ascended the piazza steps, however, he began to be appalled at the difficulty of the task that he had undertaken. Looking into the window, he saw Carice standing at the farther end of the long parlor, with her bridesmaids clustered around her. He could neither get at her, nor she escape, without challenging a good deal of wondering observation. While he stood hesitating, Godfrey Bergan came out into the hall, and caught sight of his troubled face.

"Well, Bruno, what do you want?"

"I—jes' wanted to speak to Miss Carice," stammered the negro.

The request was an odd one, at that moment; still, Mr. Bergan might have been moved to grant it, as the whim of an old and faithful servant, if the negro's disturbed face and faltering tone had not excited his suspicions that something unusual was on foot. "What is the matter?" he asked. "What do you want to speak to her for?"

Bruno was wholly unprepared for this question. Vainly he racked his brains for a plausible answer, but nothing better rewarded his efforts than,—“I jes’ wanted to speak to her, dat’s all;”—a reply so little congruous with his frightened face and voice, that Mr. Bergan’s suspicions were confirmed. He stepped out on the piazza, and closed the door behind him.

“Now, Bruno,” said he, sternly, “I want to know what this means. Come, no shuffling; tell the truth.”

Bruno’s self-possession gave way entirely. “I—I—I—it’s only Mr. Arling.”

Mr. Bergan started. “My nephew, Bergan Arling, do you mean?”

“Yes, massa.”

“What—where?”

“Out dar, under de larches, massa.”

“And he—he dared to ask for my daughter?”

Mr. Bergan’s voice shook with anger. Bruno tried to explain, not very coherently.

“He didn’t mean no harm, massa, I’s *sertain*. He said her happiness and all you’s happiness, was at de stake.”

“Did he!” muttered Mr. Bergan, scornfully. “Hark you, Bruno, not a word of this to anybody—to *anybody*, mind you! Now, go back to your dance,—I’ll see Mr. Arling.”

Bergan’s impatience had brought him from under the larches to a point commanding a view of the path to the cottage. He was both surprised and disappointed to see his uncle instead of Carice; nevertheless, he came frankly forward to meet him, holding out his hand.

Mr. Bergan took no notice of the friendly offer. “How dare you show yourself here?” he began, his voice quivering with rage. “How dare you insult my daughter with your presence, at this time? Have you not done harm enough already?”

"Uncle," replied Bergan, gently, "I know not what you mean. I have never harmed Carice, that I know of, and now I came here to save her, if it be not too late. Oh! uncle"—and here his calmness began to fail him, and his voice grew eager—"do not, *do* not let this marriage proceed,—at least, not until you have heard my story, and have satisfied yourself of the real character of this Doctor Remy!"

"What have you to say against his character?" demanded Mr. Bergan, icily.

Bergan felt the full disadvantage of his position. It was a heavy charge that he had to make against a man of Doctor Remy's standing, without documents or witnesses, nothing to substantiate it but his single assertion. Besides, to say truth, there was nothing to allege against Doctor Remy but Doctor Trubie's suspicions. He hesitated, and his hesitation was not lost upon his uncle; neither was the want of assurance with which he finally spoke.

"Uncle, there is great reason to believe—or, at least to suspect—that Doctor Remy is a—murderer,—the murderer of my brother Alec."

Godfrey Bergan stood in silent scorn. The accusation struck him as too extravagant, too baseless, to be seriously discussed. His nephew must be drunk, or mad, to make it. And, now that he looked at him more narrowly, his face was haggard and his dress disordered enough to befit either condition.

Bergan saw the impression that he had made, and a cold, sick despair crept over him. "I beg of you, uncle," he exclaimed, vehemently, "as you value your own future peace of mind, put a stop to this unhappy business, ere it be too late."

"It is too late now," said Mr. Bergan, impatiently, "Carice is already married."

"Must she, therefore, be left in the hands of a murderer?"

Save her, at least, from further contamination. If you will do nothing else, call her, and let her decide the matter for herself."

"Impossible," answered Mr. Bergan, decidedly. "Carice has already borne and suffered too much; her nerves are in an exceedingly sensitive state; this story would kill her, I verily believe. If you really have her happiness at heart, go away quietly, and leave her to the care of the husband she has chosen."

"Chosen?" repeated Bergan, bitterly,—"*has* she chosen him, or has she only been forced to wed him?"

Godfrey Bergan's eyes lit. "You forget to whom you are speaking," said he, coldly. "Enough of this, my patience is exhausted. I have listened to your drivel longer than it deserves. The quicker you take your leave, the better."

Bergan drew himself up haughtily, and his eyes flashed back an answering flame. "My patience is also exhausted," said he. "I have begged and pleaded long enough. I tell you now, uncle, that I will not go, until I have seen Carice, if I seek her out among the wedding guests."

Godfrey Bergan set his teeth hard. "Will not?" he repeated angrily. "*Will not!* I will have you to understand, young man, that there is neither *will*, nor *will not*, on these premises, but mine. On my soul, if you do not go, and quickly, I will call my servants, and have you put off from the place as a drunkard and a vagabond."

At this threat, the hereditary temper, scotched in Bergan's heart, but not yet killed, reared its evil head aloft, and sent its deadly poison burning through all his veins.

"Call them," he retorted, in a voice deep and low as a distant thunder peal, and lifting his clenched hand on high,—"*call them*, if it so pleases you! Their blood be on your head, not mine."

Godfrey Bergan was no coward, yet he might well stand aghast at the unexpected fury of the tempest that he

had evoked. Moreover, to put his threat in execution, he now saw, was to court that publicity which he specially desired to avoid. He stood irresolute, questioning within himself how best to deal with the emergency.

He was saved the trouble of a decision. While he still hesitated, Bergan's hand fell by his side, his eyes softened, and a spasm of anguish passed over his face. "God forgive me!" he murmured, shudderingly,—“I, too, was a murderer—in heart!”

He bowed his head on his hands. Woful was the inner conflict. Within his soul, the “black Bergan temper” was gasping out its last venomous breath, with the clutch of a firm hand on its throat. Agonizing were its death-throes. They ceased at last. It would never trouble him more.

Godfrey Bergan, standing by, saw something of the struggle, yet did not understand it in the least. “A drunkard's aimless wrath!” he said to himself,—“quenched in its own fury.”

So carelessly does the world construe the deeper soul-conflicts that come under its observation!

Bergan lifted his head, and his face was ashy pale. “I go, uncle,” said he, hoarsely, “since that is your wish. In all that I have said, though said never so unwisely, I assure you that I have had only Carice's happiness at heart; and I pray God that you may not have cause to rue it, to your dying day, that you did not listen to me!”

He turned and plunged into the darkness, not knowing whither he went.

XIII.

ESCAPED.

GODFREY BERGAN stood motionless for some minutes. His nephew's persistency had irritated his nerves, if it had not convinced his understanding. Nor was he altogether unimpressed by the solemnity of the young man's parting words. Though he had not condescended to state the fact to Bergan, it was still true that he had exacted what he considered to be very complete and satisfactory evidence, touching the correctness of Doctor Remy's antecedents, before giving him his daughter. Yet it was only after he had recapitulated this evidence to himself, point by point, and had also taken into account the doctor's late brilliant achievements, present high standing, and promising prospects for the future, that he could rid himself of a certain chill weight of responsibility, which seemed somehow to have been flung upon his shoulders by Bergan's last sentence.

On entering the cottage, he met Carice in the hall, encircled by her bridesmaids. He was half pleased, half startled to see that the singular listlessness, amounting to a degree of apathy, which had characterized her for some weeks, had given place to a certain tremulous agitation. A round red spot burned on either cheek, where of late the bloom had been both rare and faint; and her eyes were bright and wistful almost to wildness. With a sudden impulse of tenderness, he put his arms round her, and pressed her to his heart.

"Father," she whispered, with her lips close to his ear,

"am I dreaming or mad? I have heard a voice in the air—Bergan's voice. I was standing by the window, and I heard it distinctly,—no words, only tones,—pleading, pleading, until I thought they would break my heart. Then all at once, they changed to anger,—fierce, bitter anger! And they ended in despair! Father, what could it mean!"

"My child," said Godfrey Bergan, after a pause, and there was a perceptible tremor in his voice, "you are very weak and nervous, and these wedding gayeties have been too much for you. Go to rest, and sleep away your fatigues and your fancies together; joy cometh in the morning. The wife of Felix Remy will hear no voices in the air. Good-night."

He unclasped his arms, and her bridesmaids, again clustering round her, led her upstairs in triumph.

But no sooner had they freed her from her bridal garniture,—the veil's soft mistiness, the robe's heavy, satiny folds, the fragrant orange blossoms, already beginning to fade!—than she put them gently aside.

"Bid me good-night, now," she said, with quiet decision. "I am very tired, and I want to be alone for awhile. Rosa will do the rest."

There was something in her tone which forbade remonstrance; quickly the door shut out the fresh, young faces, and snowy, fluttering robes.

Was she, as she had desired to be, alone?

Alas! no. The image evoked by that "voice in the air," had followed her across the threshold, and still faced her with sad, upbraiding eyes. Instinctively, she threw herself upon her knees to exorcise it by the spell of prayer. Though no intelligible word might come to her trembling lips, though not a coherent thought might shape itself in her dizzy brain, she was, nevertheless, prostrate at the foot of the cross, and the Saviour would understand!

And so—let us not presume to doubt it—He did, and,

moreover, answered. But the ways of Providence are utterly inscrutable; and the answer came in no shape that would have been likely to present itself to her mind, had she been capable of definite thought. She rose from her knees but little comforted.

For the delirious disquietude that had taken possession of her, had its physical, not less than its mental, side. The long overstraining of the delicate nerves, the long overburdening of the heart that knew its own bitterness, were fast reaching the point beyond which must needs come fever, or insanity, or death. Nature—often the wisest of physicians, when left to herself—had sought to work restoration by means of the apathy aforementioned, wrapping her mind and heart as with quilted armor; but the events of this night had pierced quite through the soft sheathing, and set every nerve quivering with pain. Unable to remain long in one position, she soon began to pace restlessly up and down the room. She was dimly aware that Rosa had come in, and was waiting her commands; but she never once looked to see with what a disturbed and doubtful face the young negress was regarding her.

Getting weary, at last, of her monotonous march to and fro, she went to the window, and leaned out to bathe her fevered temples in the cool night air. Suddenly she cried out;—

“Rosa, see! Is not that a light in the old Hall?”

“Yes, Miss Carice, it’s just that,” answered Rosa, impressively. “It’s in Mr. Arling’s room. He’s here.”

“Here!” Carice started, and turned round with eager, expectant eyes.

“No, no,” Rosa hastened to say, “not *here*,—at least, not now.”

“Not now,” repeated Carice, wonderingly. “When was he here, then?”

Rosa hesitated for an instant, and then flung herself at her mistress’s feet. “I will tell you,” she cried, vehem-

mently,—“master may kill me, if he likes, but I *will* tell you! Mr. Arling was here not much more than half an hour ago.”

Carice smiled,—a strange, wan smile, with no spirit of mirthfulness in it, but something of gentle triumph, as well as relief. “It was no fancy, then,” she murmured, softly.

Rosa went on. “I was walking down by the river—with Tom, you know—when I thought it must be getting late, and you might want me, and so I took the short cut through the larches. And who should I see standing there but Mr. Arling, and your father coming to meet him! So I slipped back behind the trees, meaning to come round the other way; but I caught a few words, and then I listened;—I couldn’t help it, Miss Carice, if I’d died for it. For Mr. Arling began to beg and plead that your father wouldn’t let your wedding go on, if he cared anything about your happiness. He said there was something dreadful against Doctor Remy,—oh! Miss Carice, I don’t like to say it, but I think you ought to know,—he said he was a” —sinking her voice almost to a whisper—“a murderer.”

Carice’s eyes dilated with horror. “A murderer!” she gasped,—“oh! no, no, Rosa; you could not have heard him right!”

“Indeed I did,” rejoined Rosa, firmly. “That’s the very word he used,—more than once, too. At least, he said there was great reason to believe so; and he begged your father to wait until he could make sure about it. Oh! Miss Carice, I never did like Doctor Remy, but I always liked Mr. Arling, and I don’t believe he’d say a word that wasn’t true. Do pray wait, as he said, until you can find out the whole truth, before you have anything more to say to the doctor. Lock your door, and say you’re sick—I’m sure you look as if you might be—and I’ll promise to keep him out, if he were ten Doctor Remys.”

And Rosa set her teeth and clenched her hands, in a

way that promised much for her valor in the cause of her young mistress.

Carice put her hand to her brow, and tried to think, but merely succeeded in bewildering herself with images of horror. That frightful word, *murderer*, continually sounded in her ears, to the effectual hindrance of anything like connected thought. Only one idea presented itself to her confused brain with even tolerable distinctness,—Bergan was near, Bergan was in possession of knowledge that might yet relieve her, to some extent, from a burden too heavy to be borne,—a burden which she ought never to have consented to take upon herself, nor ever would have done, had she not first been bound fast with a torpor that benumbed both feeling and will. Still, having so consented, she would have tried, but for Rosa's terrible revelation, to endure it patiently. Now, it seemed to her, this was no longer possible.

Again she fixed her eyes upon the gleaming light from the old Hall; the only star of hope or suggestion that had yet risen upon her darkness. What could she do, in her mortal terror and bewilderment, but follow it?

"Rosa," she said, suddenly, "I am going to the Hall. I must see Bergan, and hear what he has to say; then I can decide what it is right to do."

"And so I would," rejoined Rosa, approvingly. "Just let me slip this dark wrapper on you, and wind this scarf round your head, and well over your face,—so;—why, your own father wouldn't know you, if he were to meet you! Now, we'll be off."

Carice hesitated. "No, Rosa, that will never do; our absence would be quickly discovered. You must stay and keep the door."

"But, Miss Carice, you can't go alone!"

"I can, and must. It is the only way to prevent discovery. Remember, no one is to be let in, upon any consideration, until I return."

"Let me alone for that," responded Rosa, emphatically. And having seen Carice safely down the steps from the upper piazza, and watched her light form till it was lost among the trees, Rosa returned to mount guard over the door of the deserted chamber.

Godfrey Bergan had been unaccountably shaken by that brief meeting and parting with his daughter, in the hall. Watching her slender form as it toiled up the staircase, with the languid step that betrays a heavy or a reluctant heart, he sighed to think with what a graceful alacrity she had used to flit upward, as if lifted on invisible wings, her happy smile seeming to make a little illuminated space about her, like the light which is seen irradiating angelic forms, in old pictures. A sudden burden of despondency fell upon his heart, whereof he understood neither the purport, nor whether it bore reference to her or himself, but only knew that it quite unfitted him for playing the part of a gay and gracious host to his guests. Seeing Miss Ferrars coming toward him, with her stereotyped smile, an impulse of flight seized him; and hastily stepping through one of the long windows, he soon found himself once more under the sighing trees, which were swaying to and fro under the first breathings of a rising wind.

The night was no longer dark. Here and there, a star looked through the broken clouds, and lighted him to the river's bank, down which he walked slowly; torturing himself, as he went, with that weary after-birth of doubts and questions, which often follows hard upon the accomplishment of a cherished purpose. Had he done well in wedding Carice to the doctor? Had he not done wrong in refusing to listen to Bergan, at least with courtesy and calmness? Was it barely possible that there could have been some small grain of truth at the bottom of the young man's turbid story? What was the meaning of that odd, wild look in Carice's eyes? Had he been thrusting himself, as it were, into the

awful place of Providence, only, by reason of his human short-sightedness, to work irremediable ruin?

At that moment, a dark, slender woman's figure hurried past him, toward the ruined foot-bridge, which was near at hand. "One of my brother's servants, who has stolen over to dance with mine," he said to himself, turning idly to watch her progress.

To his utter amazement, at the further end, he seemed to see her cast herself deliberately into the water!

Godfrey Bergan was a practised swimmer, and, after the first motionless moment of astonishment, he threw off his coat, plunged into the stream, which, at this point, was neither rapid nor deep, and swam rapidly toward the spot where he had seen the body disappear. Here, the water was scarcely up to his armpits; in a few moments, he had caught the floating garments, and borne the lifeless form to land. The heavy head fell back on his arm; the scarf trailed away from the white features; he recognized Carice!

With a thick, muffled cry of horror, the father sank upon his knees, not so much of devotional intent, as crushed under the double-weight of his physical burden and mental anguish.

"Oh, God! have mercy upon us!" he ejaculated, brokenly,—“I have driven my child to suicide!”

XIV.

THE WAY STOPPED.

BERGAN ARLING, on quitting his uncle, had flung himself into the surrounding darkness, without aim, without hope; conscious only of an intolerable burden of grief and despair. Coming to the river, he had mechanically strode down its bank. Mechanically, too, he had crossed the foot-bridge, when it came in his way; and was scarcely aware that its last rotten plank, on the Hall end, had given away under his feet, and that he had narrowly missed being precipitated into the water. In due time, he found himself standing before the deserted mansion, looking up to its dark front with eyes just beginning to be capable of intelligent vision, and acknowledging to himself that, though his path had been but blindly chosen, it had brought him to a fitting goal.

"A ruined home, and a ruined life," he murmured, with a kind of bitter mournfulness,—“they will suit each other well!”

The door was locked, but there was a dilapidated flight of steps leading to the rotten upper piazza, and the window of his old room yielded readily to pressure. The lamp, too, was in its remembered place, and, having lighted it, he threw himself into a chair, to sum up the record of his past life, and strike the balance.

Not that he did this consciously. Although he felt intuitively that he had reached a turning-point in his path, from whence its course and circumstance, if not its aim, might well be changed, it was with the future only—the consideration of the question what to do next—that he

purposed to occupy himself. But the sight of the familiar room, and the ancient furniture and ornaments wherewith he had filled it, having inevitably recalled the period of his first occupancy, and the occasion of his sudden departure, he could not fail to see how all his life since had seemed to hinge on that one deplorable incident. Had he resisted Major Bergan's will in the single particular of entering that vile tavern, or refused, first as well as last, to drink at his bidding, doubtless he would have lost *his* favor all the same, but he would scarcely have been so completely subjugated by his own fierce temper, he would not have commenced his career in Berganton under such a cloud, he would not have been left to drift in so inauspicious an intimacy with Doctor Remy, his Uncle Godfrey would not have become so deeply prejudiced against him,—possibly, even, the course of his love might have run smooth, despite the verdict of the immortal poet, nor yet have vitiated its claim to be a "true" one. What a pregnant commentary was all this upon that wonderful text of Mr. Islay's memorable sermon. How tightly had he been "holden with the cords of his sins" to a long and wearisome discipline, and a final mystery of retribution,—a retribution involving, alas! the innocent not less than the guilty. Poor, poor Carice! how much easier would it be to bear his own portion, if only hers could be remitted!

Hark! was not that a cry from the direction of the river? He leaned out of the window, and listened attentively; but the sound—if sound it were, and not the simple product of his own disordered fancy—was not repeated. Nothing was to be heard save the low sough of the rising wind, and the melancholy voices of the trees, as one solemn old oak-top leaned toward another, and talked mysteriously of some woful event that it had witnessed—perhaps a century ago, perhaps later—or recounted drearily the long list of human sorrows and sins and retributions stored up in its dreamy old memory. There might have been heard,

too, in its further talk, if only the ear were fine enough that listened,—something of patience born of sorrow, and blessedness wrenched from the hand of suffering; of lofty hopes blossoming out of the ashes of despair, and fair, new temples, vocal with the anthem of glory to God and good will to man, built over and out of heaps of ruins. A few words, too, might have been added of love—human love—as the crowning grace and gladness of a man's life,—the delicate carving beautifying the arches, capitals, and pinnacles of the temple, the thick greenery softening its sharp outlines, and the odorous blossoms rooting themselves in its angles and hollows; but neither its strong foundations, its majestic walls, nor the upward spring of its spire,—and never, in any sense, the object of its rightful worship.

Perhaps Bergan heard something of all this; at any rate, that cry from the river, whether real or imagined, had broken the thread of his review of the past, and brought back his mind to the question of the future. What was to be done? Leave Berganton, of course. The place was not wide enough to hold Carice and himself, with comfort to either. If her marriage had been brought about in the way that he suspected, the sight of him would scarce conduce to her peace; while the sight of her, in her new relation, could only cause him useless pain. Moreover, he had seen, from the first, that Berganton afforded little scope for talent; none whatever for ambition. And, now that his life seemed likely to be limited to its public side, and to have no sweet, compensating domestic one, he felt the necessity of directing its course to some quarter where there was room for proper expansion.

Happily, the way was open. Only a short time ago, he had received a most favorable offer, which he still held under consideration,—an invitation to enter into partnership with an eminent lawyer of Savalla, beginning to succumb to the infirmities of old age, and likely, ere long, to surrender to him all the active business of the firm.

Nothing could suit him better. Here was scope for all his talent, employment for all his energy. He would be near enough to Berganton, too, for any good name that he might win to reach thither, and clear away whatever prejudice against him still lingered there; yet not near enough to be necessarily brought into contact with its inhabitants.

So much for the future; what of the present?

First, he would see Mrs. Lyte and Astra, bid them farewell, and arrange for the removal of his effects. Then he would hasten to Savalla, to do the last kindness that it was in his power to do for Carice, even though it would seem to justify her father's late incredulity and contemptuous treatment,—namely, meet Doctor Trubie, and dissuade him from any further proceedings against Doctor Remy. There was still room for a doubt that the latter was the murderer of Alec Arling;—let it remain forever a doubt! No weapon should be lifted against him, that must needs fall most heavily upon Carice!

It was gray dawn when this conclusion was reached. The stars were fading from the sky, as a hint that it was time to extinguish his lamp. The East showed a broad rim of light,—only a silver one now, but with some mystic intimation of the gold to which it would soon be transmuted. Was any similar change beginning to show itself in Bergan's heart?

If so, he was in nowise conscious of it. His mind having attained to a comparative degree of composure, his body began to press its claims upon him with some pertinacity. It was twenty-four hours since he had taken food, and nearly double that time since he had slept; this, too, on the end of a long, tedious journey, and while undergoing sore anxiety and distress of mind. No wonder that his head was aching furiously at the temples, and seemed to have a ponderous weight on top, nor that he had a sensation of dizziness at times, while a blinding mist came before his eyes.

He prepared to leave Bergan Hall. That, too, was to be

henceforth, so far as he was concerned, a thing of the past. It had given him needful solitude and shelter, in his hour of deep despair; it had been the fittest possible place wherein to take leave of the old life and its shattered hope; but for the new, it had nothing to offer,—except, perhaps, a warning. The stream of active, expansive, beneficent life must forever flow away from its faded splendor, its crumbling massiveness, its dusty traditions and aristocratic genealogies, and its corrupt feudal laws and customs, as well as from that moral ruin, its selfish, tyrannic, besotted master. Together, they might well be likened to a half-buried, decomposing corpse; showing still, through the overspreading mould and fungi, some faint trace of its former grace and nobility of shape and feature, but chiefly impressing the spectator with the carelessness of its exposure and the unsightliness of its decay.

And yet, how strong a hold, after all, had both master and mansion upon his heart! Some time, surely, when he should have won fame and fortune enough to be above all suspicion of self-seeking, he might come back to visit them, and see what could be done for both.

With this thought in his mind, he was about to quit the room as he had entered it, by the window, when a light knock on the door arrested his attention. Almost immediately, Rue entered, and bade him good morning.

“How did you know I was here?” was Bergan’s first startled inquiry.

“I heard you when you came,” she answered, quietly, “and I knew your step. I always spend this night in the old house; it is the anniversary of your mother’s wedding; and she comes back to me in all her youth and beauty, and the rooms light up, and flowers sweeten the air, and there is music and dancing, and the sound of gay young voices; and then, all goes out, and I remember that earth grows dim as heaven draws near. Yes, Master Bergan, I heard you when you came, and I should have come to you

at once, only that there was something in your step which told me you came with a heavy heart, and would not like to be disturbed. It is lighter now ? ”

“ A little, maumer ; though it is heavy enough yet.”

“ And nothing will lighten it but time,—and that means the Lord, for time is the Lord’s servant, and does His will.”

“ You know, then,”—began Bergan, and stopped, unable to finish the sentence.

“ I know much, Master Bergan ; more than you think. Many voices come to whisper in the old blind woman’s ear.”

“ Do you know,” asked Bergan, suddenly, “ why Doctor Remy has married Carice ? ”

“ Certainly,—to make himself master of Bergan Hall. The more fool he ! Rue could have told him it was written on the stars that it should have another and a better master ; and the stars do not lie. But I am sorry for Miss Carice ; I would have saved *her* if I could, but there the stars were silent.”

“ I could have helped the stars in that matter, if I had known,” thought Bergan. But he only asked, doubtfully ; —“ How should Doctor Remy expect to get the Hall by marrying Carice ? ”

“ Because your Uncle Harry has made his will, giving it to her. Never doubt me, Master Bergan, I know what I am talking of ; and when I tell you that you shall yet own Bergan Hall, and all the gold that is hidden in it, and every foot of land that belongs to it, you may believe it as implicitly as if it were written in your Bible.”

Bergan shook his head ; the Hall had ceased to have any value in his eyes, as a possession of his own, or any place in the future that he proposed to himself. Apparently, Rue understood his silence as well as if he had spoken, for she did not press the subject.

She next inquired into his plans, and he explained them to her, as far as they concerned himself.

"It is well," she said, after a moment of reflection. "You could not stay here, of course,—you would be eating your heart out in this dull place. Do your duty in the path that lies so straight before you, and trust God for the rest."

As he quitted the old Hall it occurred to him how strangely events were repeating themselves. Once more, Rue stood in the doorway, in the gray light of the dawn, and promised him its future ownership; once more, he took the road to Berganton, leaving behind him one phase of his life, and entering upon a new one.

Arrived at the hotel he learned that the horse, which he had left at Oakstead on the previous evening, had been sent to the stables, with strict injunctions that he should be notified accordingly, immediately on his arrival,—the friendly act, no doubt, of old Bruno.

Here, too, he first learned the absence of Mrs. Lyte and her family; a piece of information which he received with much unmistakable surprise and wonder, that the landlord, who, like most of the Berganton folk, had suspected him of some connection with their departure, was constrained to believe him innocent.

There being now nothing to detain him in Berganton, he ordered his horse for an immediate return to Savalla. First, however, he went to the breakfast-room, but found that he was unable to eat; food was like ashes in his mouth; the most that he could do was to swallow a cup of coffee.

That ride to Savalla remained always a horrible nightmare in his memory. Sometimes he was riding through the darkness of infinite space; sometimes through whirling trees, over a road heaving as with the throes of an earthquake, and seemingly interminable. Now and then, his senses seemed slipping entirely from his grasp, and were only dragged back by the convulsive effort of an iron will. Reaching the office of the Pulaski House, where he was well known, he just managed to hold them together long

enough to scratch a few lines on a sheet of paper, and give directions for its delivery. Then, with a wan smile of relief, he relaxed his hold, and let them slide swiftly away into oblivion.

Two days later, Doctor Trubie, arriving at the same hotel, according to previous agreement, was met by the information that Mr. Arling was lying dangerously ill with that fever which guards, like a flaming sword, the gates of the sunny South; and the letter was put into his hands. Tearing it open, he read:—

“I charge you, by everything that is sacred, to take no further step in the business that brings you here, until I recover, and we can consult together; and, if I die, I charge you, as you would have me rest quietly in my grave, to take none at all. BERGAN.”

Doctor Trubie flung down the letter with a most disgusted face. “To think that Roath should escape me thus!” he exclaimed, discontentedly. “That is, to be sure, if Bergan does not recover. He *shall* recover!”

Upstairs he sprang, two steps at a time. But, once in Bergan’s chamber, his heart failed him. The patient lay in a stupor that seemed very near of kin to death. Two physicians stood by the bed, and the first words that met his ear were,—“No hope.”

PART FOURTH.

A NEW FIELD.

I.

ALIVE IN FAMINE.

RARELY does a man go down to the verge of the grave, and look into its profound and pregnant depths, without carrying from henceforth traces of the journey. His views of life will be truer, if not sadder, forever afterward. The laws of moral perspective, though they do not change, will be better understood ; so that objects at a distance are no longer dwarfed to the understanding, however they may appear to the eye. Character becomes the central "point of sight," toward which duty continually draws converging right lines, by the aid of which happiness, fame, and wealth, fall into their proper places, and assume their true proportions.

Bergan Arling was seated in his office at Savalla. At first sight, it might seem that he was little changed, but a closer inspection would have awakened some surprise that the lapse of little more than a year could have changed him so much. The youthfulness had gone out of his face,—that half-eager, half-wistful look which says so plainly, "The world is all before me, where to choose ;"—it was now the face of a man among men, who had found his place and his work, who had grappled with many hard problems, and solved some, who was accustomed to deal with serious sub-

jects in a serious way, and who had withal, a definite rule and object of life. In short, it was informed with a positive and noble individuality, born out of suffering, and not yet wholly oblivious of the pangs that had given it birth, but certain, in good time, to attain to the fulness of an inward joy, which, having a deep wellspring of its own, would be little dependent upon the ebb and flow of outward circumstance.

Nor had the year been fruitless of exterior results. Scarcely had Bergan mastered the details of his new office, when his partner, Mr. Youle, was taken sick, and he was left to conduct its affairs pretty much alone. Several cases of importance being in hand, he was thus afforded a rare opportunity to achieve a rapid fame. His reputation already overshadowed that of many of his legal brethren, who had greatly the advantage of him in years and experience.

From the first, he had made it an invariable rule never to speak against his clear convictions of right ; and it was curious to observe what an influence the knowledge of this fact was beginning to have upon the community. The cause which he embraced, however hopeless its aspect, always commanded a degree of respect, and was watched with a certain reservation of judgment, in consideration of his acknowledged integrity of purpose ; while, as a necessary sequence (from which Bergan, in his humility, would have been glad to escape), the cause which he was understood to have declined was apt to be pronounced suspicious in the popular judgment, however it might go in the courts. So certain is the talent which is known to be conjoined with a pure aim and an upright life, to win, soon or late, high place and strong influence, even in a world that disallows its very principle of being ! The visible fruits of righteousness commend themselves to all lips, whatever is thought of the root from whence they spring.

Bergan's desk was littered with papers, but his eyes

were studying only the opposite wall, half in abstraction, half in perplexity. Nor did their expression alter much when the door opened, and he rose to greet Mr. Youle, who came in slowly and feebly, leaning on a cane. He was of medium height, with gray hair, a thin face, and a kindly blue eye; and it was easy to see, was on the best of terms with his talented young partner. No room in that ripe intellect and gentle nature for so ignoble a passion as jealousy!

"There, that will do, Arling," he said, humorously, when Bergan had helped him carefully to a chair; "the old gentleman is as comfortable as he's likely to be,—or deserves to be, for that matter. Well, how goes on our case?"

Bergan shook his head, with a faint smile. "Very badly, I should say,—if anything can be said to go badly, which is so entirely in the hands of Providence. I confess that I can make nothing of it."

Mr. Youle looked grave. "I warned you in the beginning," said he, "that there was not a reasonable peg to hang a line of defence on."

"But I believe the man to be innocent," rejoined Bergan. "And," he added, smiling, "'I warned *you*, in the beginning,' that I should never advocate a cause which seemed to be unrighteous, nor refuse one that seemed to be just, though the one should offer me a fortune in fees, and the other not a cent."

"Yes, yes, I know," replied Mr. Youle. "And I must admit that your two rules have worked miraculously well thus far; we have lost but one case, I believe, since you came into the office. Well, well, such a vein of good luck cannot be expected to last forever,—after the nugget, the rock or the sand. But I don't see how it is that you are so strongly persuaded of Unwick's innocence."

"You would easily understand, if you had looked into his face once; it is a clean passport to confidence.

Besides, there is the unvarying testimony of his past life, as set forth by everybody that knows him,—sober, honest, frank, kind, religious, everything that is desirable. A man does not become a murderer in cold blood, all at once; he has to prepare himself for it by vice, or intemperance, or a course of hard, cold, selfish living. There is always a downward slope, before the final plunge.”

“Granted; but I doubt if you can make the jury see it clearly enough to ground a verdict of acquittal upon it, in the face of all that terribly strong circumstantial evidence.”

Bergan mused for a little time without answering. “I cannot rid myself,” he said, at length, “of a conviction that that son of the murdered man could throw some light on the subject, if he chose.”

Mr. Youle stared. “I did not know that he had been suspected, for a moment,” said he.

“Nor has he. But he is the one who profits most by the murder, since he is heir-at-law. And what a reckless and disobedient youth he has been!—always on bad terms with his father, when he was at home, and doing nothing but write letters for money, while he was in Europe. By the way, I can’t help wondering if he *was* in Europe, all this past year; though really, I don’t know why I should doubt it. Well,”—rising and looking at his watch,—“it is time to go to court.”

“And, as I am feeling better to-day, I think I’ll go along,” said Mr. Youle. “Since you seem to think that Providence has the case very specially in His hands,—indeed, I don’t mean it irreverently,—I’d like to see how He conducts it.”

“I am glad to think that He *is* conducting it,” said Bergan, in a low voice; “else I should be utterly discouraged.”

The trial dragged its slow length through the greater part of the morning, without any incident of interest. One

witness after another came upon the stand, was examined, and dismissed; each adding something to the weight of evidence against the prisoner, Unwick. The son of the murdered man, Varley by name, sat nearly opposite to Bergan, by the side of the prosecuting attorney; and being of a restless temperament, as well as gifted with extraordinary facility in the use of a pencil, he busied himself, as he listened to the monotonous drone of a witness, with mechanically sketching the faces of the witnesses or the spectators, or scenes and places that he had visited, recalled to his mind by the evidence, or by his own roving thoughts. One of these caught Bergan's eye, and he furtively watched its progress, while seeming to be occupied with his papers. When finished, it was carelessly dropped on the floor, like those which had preceded it; and the skilful pencil quickly set to work on a new subject. In a moment or two, Bergan dropped one of his papers, in a way to take it well under the table, and immediately stooped to get it. When he reappeared, a close observer might have noticed that the look of patient watchfulness, which his face had worn so long, was gone; but the keenest eyes would have been puzzled to read his present expression. Was it triumph, or thankfulness, or perplexity, or a mixture of all?

Mr. Varley was now put upon the stand, to furnish some small link in the chain of evidence that the prosecution was drawing so skilfully around the prisoner. The little that he was desired to say being said, the opposing counsel politely inquired if Mr. Arling had any questions to ask.

"One or two, if you please," answered Bergan, quietly; and rising, and turning toward the witness, he said:—

"I believe you stated, Mr. Varley, that you had never seen the place where your father died?"

"No; he bought it, and removed to it after I went abroad."

"Have you visited it, since your return?"

"I have not. I only got here just before the commencement of this trial, and I have been kept too busy since to find time for the trip."

"Then you have never seen the room where your father came to his death?"

"No, certainly not," returned the witness, beginning to look a little startled by this unaccountable persistency.

"Has it ever been very minutely described to you?"

Varley hesitated;—more, it was evident, to consider what could be the possible drift of the question, than to search his memory for a correct answer. He finally ventured to say that to the best of his recollection he had been favored with no such description.

"According to my notes of the evidence taken during this trial," pursued Bergan, "the only facts about the room brought out with much distinctness, were the positions of the bedstead and the window near it;—does your memory serve you with any additional particulars?"

"N—o," faltered the witness, with symptoms of growing uneasiness.

"Then," said Bergan, with very distinct and deliberate emphasis, "if, as you say, you never have seen this room, nor heard it minutely described, how is it that you have been able to make so accurate a representation of it as this which I hold in my hand?"

There was a breathless silence, while Bergan held up a small, but distinct, pencil sketch to the view of the pale and trembling witness.

"This sketch," continued Bergan, after waiting a few moments for the answer that did not come, "as I can vouch, and as many of these witnesses can testify, is an exact representation of the room in question, as it would appear from the head of the bedstead;—the very spot in which, it will be remembered, the prosecution has assumed that the murderer must have been concealed; and where, doubtless, he remained long enough to fix all the details of this sketch

in his memory. Here is the peculiar double window, facing the east, and wreathed round with vines, which is so marked a feature of the room, yet which there has been no need to mention, during this trial, except in the most casual way; and here, on the right, are the round table and large arm-chair, where Mr. Varley wrote, and, on the left, an old-fashioned chest of drawers, with a plaster cast of Shakespeare on top;—all in their proper places, just as I saw them when I visited the room, after undertaking the defence of this case. How is it, I ask again,” he went on, turning to the witness, “how is it that you could make this sketch, if you never saw the room?”

“Who says he made it?” demanded the opposing counsel, sharply.

“I say it,” calmly replied Bergan. “I saw him draw it, not half an hour ago, on a piece of the same paper that you are using for your notes, as you can satisfy yourself, if you choose to compare them. Besides,” he added, looking keenly at the witness, “Mr. Varley will not deny that he made it.”

No, plainly he would not, for he was physically incapable of speech. He was shivering as with an ague fit, his knees knocked together, his lips trembled convulsively, but no articulate sound came forth. In another moment, he fell forward heavily on the rail that divided the witness-stand from the lawyers’ table.

“Carry him out! Give him air!” cried a dozen voices; “he has fainted.”

“Yes, carry him out,” said Bergan gravely, and not without a touch of compassion in his voice; “since he is not on trial, we have no further need of him. But let me recommend that he be not lost sight of, till this present trial is over.”

And it was over very quickly. The influence of the scene just witnessed was not to be ignored nor overcome. Prosecution and defence were alike glad to waste no time

on the road to a foregone conclusion. The summing up, on both sides, was brief almost beyond precedent, the judge's charge was correspondingly so, and the jury returned a verdict of "Not Guilty," without leaving their seats.

"Well," exclaimed Mr. Youle, when he and Bergan had finally succeeded in escaping from the gratitude of Unwick, and the congratulations of friends. "I must say, I never saw such a sudden turn of events as that, in all my legal experience." And after a moment, he added, with unusual gravity, "It does seem as if the blessing of God were with you, and your two rules, Arling."

"I hope so," rejoined Bergan, quietly, "for I have learned that I can do nothing worth doing, without it."

"I really think," mused Mr. Youle, "if I were to live my life over again, I would adopt your plan. I am afraid that I have helped to save many a scoundrel from deserved punishment, as well as to rob an honest man, now and then, of his just rights; and when one comes to look back on it all, from the stand-point of my age, it does seem as if one might have been in better business. Yes, I believe you are right, Arling; and you have my cordial consent from this time forth, to keep on as you have begun. I confess I thought it was a freak, a whim at first, that would soon give way to the temptations—what we usually call the necessities—of actual, steady practice; but I see that you have a solid principle at the bottom, which there's no shaking. Nevertheless, Arling, you can't expect that your judgment is going to be infallible,—that you will never mistake the guilty man for the innocent one, and *vice versa*."

"I do not expect it," answered Bergan, seriously. "Errors in judgment, I take it for granted that I shall make, being mortal; but errors in will, I mean to do my best, with God's help, to avoid."

A plain carriage, with a trim African on the box, was

in waiting when the two gentlemen descended the court-house steps.

"Come, Arling," said Mr. Youle, in a tone of command rather than invitation, "go home and dine with me ; there are several things I want to talk to you about."

Bergan hesitated ; it was easy to see that the plan did not commend itself to his taste.

"Never rack your brain for excuses ; they won't serve," pursued Mr. Youle, with good-natured peremptoriness ; "I mean to take you with me, whether you will or no. It is time for you to overcome your morbid dislike of society ; besides, you will see no one but my own family."

Thus urged, Bergan could only take a seat in the carriage, and be driven off ; albeit, in direct contravention of his inclinations and habits. For, although, on coming back to life and health from the borders of death, he had been quick to hear, and to heed, the plain, stern call of Duty to work while it is yet day, there had been no gracious response in his heart, as yet, to that softer voice wherewith she enjoins brotherly kindness, as well in gentle, social courtesies and amenities as in deeds of benevolence. Life had become too serious a thing, he thought, to be wasted in trifles such as these. Busy at the centre of the circle, he had lost sight of the circumference ; intent upon the weightier matters of the law, he forgot the tithes of mint, anise and cummin, which yet, said the Master, ought not to be left undone. But it was a natural mistake, under the circumstances ; and there was still time for him to learn that, in every well-ordered life, there is a place for little things,—little courtesies, little duties, little friends.

II.

NEW ACQUAINTANCES.

“WELL, Coralie,” said Mr. Youle, an hour later, as he preceded Bergan into the drawing-room of the fine old family mansion that had been the home of the Youles for many years, “bring out your laurels, I have brought you a conquering hero.”

“Oh! it is Mr. Arling; he is very welcome.” And Coralie, who had seen Bergan two or three times in her father’s office, greeted him with marked cordiality, and gave him her small, soft hand.

It is odd how strong a resemblance can co-exist with perfect dissimilarity of features and complexion. Though she was very lovely—this Coralie Youle—and with a blithesome and bewitching loveliness all her own, Bergan had never been able to look upon her, nor could he see her now, without some deep, keen pain, as from an unhealed wound. There were tones in her voice which reminded him of one that he would hear no more; and she had ways and gestures which continually awakened memories not yet softened by distance into lines and tints of perfect purity and peace. And yet, what an irresistible, subtle charm in her was this very power to pain him!

“You said that Mr. Arling was a *conquering* hero, papa,” she went on, turning to Mr. Youle. “Have you gained the case, then, after all? That is wonderful indeed! How did it happen? Tell me all about it.”

Nothing loath, Mr. Youle gave a sufficiently graphic account of the scene in the court-room, taking occasion to

lavish no small amount of hearty encomium upon Bergan's share in it.

"How I wish I could have been there to see!" exclaimed Coralie, when the recital was ended, her cheeks glowing with sympathetic excitement; "it sounds like a chapter out of a novel, rather than a bit of real life. Mr. Arling does, in truth, deserve the laurels of victory; and, by the way—Diva! where are you?—here is some one who is worthy to give them to him."

No one had noticed, until now, that a lady was standing in the window, half concealed by the curtain. But, as she came forward everything else seemed to fade out of sight, for the moment, and leave only her, standing there alone in the clear, cold light of her marvellous beauty.

Before this, Bergan's ideal of proud and queenly beauty had been painted with dark hair and eyes; he now saw reason to change it at once and forever. The lady was the most perfect blonde that he had ever seen. Her hair was of the palest brown, with only a faint gold light in it; her eyes were blue or gray, he could not tell which, at the moment, nor would he have been less puzzled after a much longer acquaintance; and her complexion was fair and colorless, almost, as marble; yet never had he beheld anything so stately, so proud, so calm; and—it must needs be said—so cold. She came forth from the shadow of the curtain as Galatëa might have done, had she been endowed with life only, not with love.

Worthy she might be to crown a victor, in right of her queenliness, but the laurels from her hands, Bergan thought, would be very chill!

"Miss Thane!" exclaimed Mr. Youle, "why this is a surprise, and a most pleasant one. It is seldom that you allow any of us to see you here, except Coralie."

"Because my visits are usually morning visits," replied Miss Thane, in a low, yet singularly musical monotone, that harmonized perfectly with her face, "when I know

that you are sure to be better engaged than in gossiping with me."

Mr. Youle slightly raised his eyebrows, in good-humored recognition of the possibly careless, possibly studied, ambiguity of this explanation; but he let it pass without comment, as Coralie hastened to present her guests to each other.

Bergan bowed low, with the graceful deference which always marked his bearing toward women; but Miss Thane was guilty of no waste of civility. She slightly inclined her head, vouchsafed him a single glance out of her wondrous eyes, and coolly turned back to the window, to lose herself, a moment after, in a fit of abstraction.

Miss Youle—Mr. Youle's maiden sister, and the mistress of his household since his wife's death, many years ago—now appeared, clad in a thick, black silk that rustled like a field of corn in the wind, and dropped Bergan her stately, old-time courtesy. And Coralie immediately began to repeat the story of the trial to her, aided and abetted by Mr. Youle; from which embarrassing iteration Bergan would have been glad to escape, by joining Miss Thane at her window, had not her manner seemed to indicate so clearly that she was amply sufficient to herself, and did not care to be anything to anybody else. But the eloquence of Coralie and Mr. Youle finally came to a pause, if not to an end; Miss Thane roused from her abstraction; and the party went down to dinner.

Bergan was inclined to be somewhat silent, at first. Lonely dweller in offices, hotels, and restaurants, that he had been, for the year past, he had half lost the habit of conversation; besides, Coralie's tones continually swept the chords of association in a way to thrill him with a sombre mixture of pain and pleasure, and keep his mind confusedly vibrating between the present and the past. But he was too conscientiously courteous to allow himself long to remain a dead weight upon his hosts; and, though

it cost him an effort, he was soon talking with the old ease and fluency, enriched by a profounder thoughtfulness, and a subtler play of imagination. In his hands, commonplace subjects discovered hidden treasures; while loftier themes gleamed and glowed like stained windows seen against a golden western sky. Miss Thane lost something of her apathetic manner, after awhile, and paid him the compliment of listening with attention, if not with interest. And opposite to him was Coralie's listening, speaking face, full of such quick comprehension and sympathy, that he could scarcely help being beguiled into a fuller, freer expression of thought, opinion, and feeling, than he would have believed possible, an hour before.

But was it not Miss Thane's subtle management, rather than Coralie's sympathy, which finally led the talk into the sombre channels dug by human disappointments, losses, and failures, and kept it there until they had returned to the drawing-room? Then Bergan said, by way of dismissing the subject:—"But all these things are to be looked at as materials, not results. Happy the prophetic vision which sees the perfect form of the Future rising from the chaos of past and present!—as a sculptor sees before him, not a rough block of marble, but the finished statue,—an architect, not shapeless heaps of stone and mortar, but the grand completed temple."

"Let him but look far enough," rejoined Miss Thane, "and he can behold a sadder phase,—the statue broken and defaced, the temple overthrown and prostrate; once more a rough block of marble, and shapeless heaps of stone."

"Nay," replied Bergan, "it is at that very point that Prophecy should spread her whitest wings, and soar to the temple not made with hands, and the jewelled walls of the city let down from the clouds. Miss Coralie," he continued, glancing at the open piano, "do you sing?"

"Not much; I play mostly. But Miss Thane does. Dear Diva, won't you sing for us?"

Miss Thane looked at Bergan, but he said nothing. If he had added a word to Coralie's entreaty, the chances are that she would not have sung. But since she had only Coralie to oblige—Coralie, who alone seemed to have found the deep way to her heart, and to whom she rarely refused anything—she went straight to the piano, took the first music that presented itself, which happened to be Rossini's "*Cujus Animam*," and began to sing, not only with perfect method—that might have been expected—but with exquisite feeling. Her voice was a rich contralto, deep and broad as a river flowing to the sea, and bearing the listener whither it pleased. There were tears in the eyes of her auditors, when she had finished, and would have been, doubtless, had she sung anything else, for the quality of her voice touched that point of perfection, which, in this world, gives a pleasure closely akin to pain.

She waited a moment, but no one spoke; then she put her fingers again on the keys, and, looking far out into the evening dusk, sang a dismal, hopeless dirge, which Bergan felt intuitively to be her own; and which wrung his heart with passionate longing and pain. She would sing no more.

Yet no one could talk after those heartbreaking strains. So Bergan quietly took his leave.

Coralie wound her arm round her friend's waist, and drew her to the window, to watch him down the street. "What do you think of him?" she asked.

"I think—that he has a genius for conversation," replied Miss Thane, coolly.

"Oh, Diva, you know that is not what I mean! How do you like him?"

"I like no one—but you. I think I might respect him in time. As for you, little one, take care you do not like him too well."

"Why?" asked Coralie, blushing.

"Because he has buried his heart—the best part of it—in somebody's grave."

III.

FARVIEW.

DIVA THANE, it is perhaps needless to say, was a child of the North. Her peculiar type of beauty blossoms only out of soil, which, for half the year, withdraws its warmth into its deep heart, and wraps itself in a chill, white robe of snow. She had made her appearance in Savalla, about a twelvemonth before, unheralded and unknown, had rented the parlor of a decayed aristocratic mansion as a studio, and had tacked on the door a card signifying to the public that she was a painter in oils. She had thenceforth been an example of that freedom and independence of life which Art makes possible for its votaries, of either sex, as a compensation, in some sort, for the sacrifices that they are bound to make to her.

It soon became known that the Youles endorsed Miss Thane to the fullest extent, both socially and financially; else society might have given her a cool reception. But it could scarcely, in its haughtiest mood, have meted out to her a fuller measure of scornful indifference than she accorded to it, when, in due time, it made up its mind to hold out a condescending hand to her. She declined its invitations, she took no notice of its calls, she would none of its patronage. Just in proportion as it grew more eager, piqued by her indifference, and curious to penetrate the mystery which surrounded her, she became colder and more distant. Finally, society was compelled to understand that the sole favor which she would accept at its hands, was forgetfulness of her existence.

Nor was the public treated much better, in her capacity

of artist. Visitors at her studio found free admission, and opportunity to examine, at their leisure, the pictures, sketches, and studies, which crowded the walls; but rarely did she turn from her easel, to give them more than the briefest glimpse of her statuesque beauty, or the most concise of answers to their questions. Generally, she found some reason for declining their orders; and fully one half of the pictures on her walls were labelled, "Not to be Sold," while the sale of the remainder was plainly a matter of the profoundest indifference to her. It must needs be inferred that she had means of subsistence other than her art, amply sufficient for her quiet, inexpensive mode of life.

Nevertheless, she worked with indefatigable industry, as well as undeniable talent. If her pictures evinced some lack of technical skill, they were endued with a force and feeling which more than atoned for its absence; since the one would address itself chiefly to connoisseurs, while the other went straight to the universal heart. They covered a wide range of subjects, yet a profound observer would have traced a certain connection and sequence in them all. The earlier and cruder efforts of her pencil were pleasant outdoor scenes,—children wading in a sunshine brook, farm youths and maidens tossing about new-mown hay, and village girls dancing under wide-spreading boughs,—scenes so perfect in their idealization as to seem familiar to every eye, yet never without that inestimable something added or eliminated, which constitutes the difference between the picturesque and the commonplace. After these came works not only marked by greater skill of design and felicity of color, but informed with a deeper feeling;—yet so delicately indicated that none but the finest instinct would have perceived how softly Love illumined the landscape, or shone in the smile of the youth, or looked up to the maiden from her own downcast eyes reflected in the water. Then came a sudden change,—pictures and sketches wherein the artist's

pencil must have been driven by some terrible intensity of feeling, to have wrought with such sombre power;—such as an illimitable desert, with a man riding fast toward a wan, setting sun, and his long, backward shadow falling upon a woman's outstretched, yearning hands,—or the black silhouette of a drifting and dismantled ship, seen against a blood-red moon, setting in a dun and angry sea,—or a deep and dismal cavern, with a female figure lying bruised and broken at the bottom of a fissure, and a man, also torn and bleeding, seen at the end of a long vista, searching for what he will not find. These pictures affected the spectator like a nightmare; there was such a fell shadow of immitigable fate in them all, and so notable an absence of anything like hope or faith, that while he acknowledged their power, he shuddered at their spirit.

Of course, Rumor could not help busying herself with a subject so inviting as the artist, though so bare of definite results. She was variously reported to be an escaped nun, a bride that had nearly lost her life at the hands of an insane bridegroom, a widow—barely one month a wife—seeking to throw off an intolerable burden of grief by the help of new scenes, new faces, and a new manner of life, and an heiress, fled from the importunities of harsh guardians and an unwelcome suitor. It will serve as an indication of the occasional correctness of the popular instinct, that not one of these conjectures cast any shadow upon the whiteness of her fame. Not more inevitably did her face suggest snow, marble, and whatever was at once white and cold, than her demeanor suggested their chill purity. Moreover, notwithstanding that she led so unfettered and independent a life, as compared with the majority of her sex—dwelling under her own guardianship, and ordering her day's routine to her own liking—the closest scrutiny could not detect anything therein, that was not austere, lonely, and laborious enough to suit the cell of an anchorite.

Yet, though there was so little in her way of living to suggest affluence, it soon became known that her hands were open, and her purse deep, to any claim upon her benevolence. While it never appeared that she set herself to seek out objects of charity, to such as came to her, either in person or by proxy, her bounty was generally far in excess of the demand. The only grace which it lacked, was that subtle element of the giver in the gift, which imparts a sympathetic warmth to the silver or the gold, as it is dropped in the outstretched hand; augmenting, to a degree incalculable by any known arithmetic, its power of relieving the distressed heart. Though Miss Thane gave generously, she gave none the less carelessly and coldly.

The only person whom she distinguished by any mark of affection, or measure of confidence, was Coralie Youle. The two had been classmates at a Northern boarding-school, where the native girl had first soothed and petted the stranger through a severe attack of homesickness, and then had been devotedly nursed, in her turn, during a trying dispensation of scarlet fever; in consequence of which a friendship of more than ordinary warmth and tenacity had grown up between them; manifesting itself on Coralie's part, by a half worshipping admiration, and on Diva's, by the strong, yearning clasp of a nature that puts forth no slender, fragile tendrils, but clings only in virtue of a bend or coil of its own tough fibre. To Coralie she was never cold, never unresponsive; the girl knew that there was no veiled, inner chamber of her friend's heart to which she had not some time penetrated, and which she would be allowed to enter again, whenever her presence could throw one ray of light across its dusk. With that she was satisfied. One thing the two possessed in common—the most absolute trust in each other.

Still, though Diva always received Coralie at her studio with deep-lit eyes of welcome, and a hand-clasp into which she had the power of putting more tenderness than ordinary

women would express by a close embrace, and though she often joined her in long walks through the city and suburbs, it was rarely that she could be persuaded to visit her in her own home. If she did so, it was usually at an hour when she would be little likely to meet the other members of the family. It was as a great favor, therefore, that she had consented to stay to dinner, on the day when Bergan had met her. Nevertheless, when Coralie really set her heart upon anything in her friend's power to give, she always gained her point. And so it came to pass that, a few weeks later, when the family left for their summer residence of Farview, in the hill-region of the State, she carried Diva with her, for a visit of a fortnight.

Thither, also, after awhile, came Bergan; yielding to Mr. Youle's entreaty that he would close the office, for at least a day or two, and give himself a breath of fresh air. Secure in his dearly bought acclimation, he had not purposed to leave the city; anticipating no worse effect from its summer atmosphere than a kind of dreamy languor, which, in his present state of mind, was perhaps more to be desired than any bracing of his energies. Nevertheless, he had come to feel for Mr. Youle a degree of filial affection; and he would not pain him by a churlish disregard of his kindness.

He reached Farview about sunset. For the last three or four miles, he had seen the low roof and broad piazzas of his goal looking down upon him from the hill top, as he journeyed up the valley, and when he finally stood on the green and flowery lawn, he felt as if his own being were suddenly and sympathetically magnified an hundred degrees, so wide was the lovely and luxuriant Southern landscape outspread before him. Field and forest spotted it with various verdure; a river drew a bright, wavy line across it; here, the yellow sunshine brought out clearly every line and tint; there, the clouds dimmed it with patches of shadow; and all around was a massive framework of sunset-gilded hills.

Half involuntarily, Bergan took off his hat. "How good are the works of God, and how harmonious in their relations to one another, when we get high enough to command a wide view of them!" he reverently thought. "So, too, I doubt not, I shall find it with the dealings of His providence, when once I have climbed to a proper standpoint whence to view them as a whole. Till then, let faith accept the truth which is hidden from sight!"

A larger party than he had expected to see, was gathered in the dining-room. A legal brother, who had received a general invitation from Mr. Youle to visit him during the Summer, had hit upon this occasion; one planter from the neighborhood was present by appointment, and another by accident; and there was also a lady friend of Miss Youle, with her young daughter, Nina, besides Miss Thane. The latter signified her remembrance of Bergan by a cool bow; but it was not until dinner was over, and the evening tolerably well advanced, that he found himself in her immediate vicinity. Coralie had been led to the piano, leaving him in a somewhat isolated position, near one of the long windows; and, while the notes of a fairy-like waltz seemed to be dropping from her slender fingers, as they flitted up and down the ivory key-board, he thought he might venture to step out on the moonlit piazza, for a few moments, without being missed. Suiting the action to the thought, he discovered that Miss Thane had made her escape before him. She was leaning against a pillar, looking out over the moon-silvered valley with a weary and wistful expression scarcely in keeping with the calm, icy indifference of her wonted aspect. With a brief apology for interrupting her, he was about to retire, when she spoke, in a tone that seemed to accord him permission to stay if he chose.

"Coralie's music sounds sweeter outside than within."

Bergan drew near to her, not to let his voice penetrate to the parlor.

"That is true, I suspect, of many things in life. To feel their full sweetness, one must get a little out of their immediate sphere."

"Is that true of persons, also?" she asked, with a keen glance.

Some moments elapsed before Bergan could answer. Compelled by the question to make a sudden, rapid investigation into the deeper things of the heart, he was confounded at the unexpected result. Too truthful, however, to attempt to hide it, he finally answered, thoughtfully;—

"In some measure, I think it is. Miss Thane, did you ever experience quite that deep delight in the presence of a friend, which you sometimes (please remember, I say only, *sometimes*) derive from the thought of him or her in absence?"

She did not answer the question. She only said, in a tone of cool irony;—"You do not flatter your friends, Mr. Arling." But in another moment, she exclaimed, with a sudden, startling intensity of passion and longing;—"Is there, then, nothing,—neither love, nor friendship,—absolutely *nothing*, which answers expectation, and satisfies desire? Horrible, horrible thought!"

"I do not think so," replied Bergan, gently; "though I confess that I was troubled, at first, by the necessity of answering your question as I did. But I now recognize the fact thus revealed to me as very satisfactory evidence that our affections, our friendships, are to know a richer and lovelier development than they can ever attain to on this earth. In heaven there must be room for every lofty ideal."

Then, with a sudden deep intuition of the real necessities of the soul beside him, he went on to say;—"Yet there, as here, I suppose, the one satisfying, completing thing will be the love of God. The soul was made to look up, not along a level; it can only find its highest joy in something superior to itself."

She turned, and looked him intently in the face.

"Do you believe what you say?" she asked, doubtfully.

Very solemnly Bergan answered;—"I do."

"Belief is nothing," she rejoined, after a pause, "action is the test. Do you *live* your belief?"

Bergan drew a deep breath. "I try to do so, Miss Thane."

She went on, seemingly so intent upon her own train of thought as to be utterly unmindful of the solemn and searching nature of the questions that she was putting;—

"You feel, then, this all-satisfying love of God in your heart?"

"In some measure, I trust I do."

"And when the sun suddenly dropped, or faded, out of your sky, and the past became a corpse, and the present a burden, and the future a blank, what comfort did it give you?"

"The comfort of knowing that all things work together for the good of those that love God," responded Bergan, not without a momentary wonder at the curious appositeness of the question to his recent experiences, but quickly divining that she was looking more into her own heart than his, in asking it.

"Good," she repeated, musingly; "you did not say, happiness."

"Good is a better word than happiness, in this world. In the world to come, they will be synonyms."

She gave him another long, penetrating look. Then she said, quite simply, and evidently with no thought or intention of paying him compliments;—"You have talents, you have culture, you have a clear and powerful intellect (I heard Judge Emly begin an argument with you just now, and you soon cut the very ground from under his feet), you have been wonderfully successful, too, considering your years,—yet you do not hesitate to bind yourself to these narrow theories."

“Narrow, do you think them? Broad, rather, since they link eternity to time, and give one the long outlook and overlook which alone reveal things in their true relations. No one can construe this world aright, or even satisfactorily, without doing it by the light of the next. As for intellect, Miss Thane, some of the most commanding intellects of the world have been defenders of the ‘faith once delivered.’ And, if such had been lacking, there is a certain Book that Time has not been able to make obsolete, nor Science to nullify, which tells how, aforetime, God chose the foolish things of the world to confound the wise: and He can do it again, when the necessity arises.”

“You are content, then, to feel that your intellect, your learning, give you no advantage, in these matters, over the most ignorant of your neighbors?”

“I am content to know that, in religion as in most other things, though books may help, thorough knowledge is of experience. The man who feels most of the Spirit of God in his heart, and makes it most clearly manifest in his life, is the man most competent, other things being equal, to analyze its operations and effects. Political economy, Miss Thane, is not the only subject about which men may prate very learnedly, and know very little.”

Coralie’s music ceased suddenly. There was a little stir in the parlor, and a murmur of voices, as if some subject of interest were under discussion.

“Go,” commanded Miss Thane, “they will be looking for you. I will follow you in a few moments.”

He stepped back through the window. Coralie came toward him. “We are talking,” said she, “of going down to the negroes’ camp-meeting, a little below here; Mr. Sypher was just telling us that it is a sight well worth seeing, by night. Will you go?”

“I am entirely at your service,” replied Bergan, courteously.

“And Diva!—where is she? Oh, there she comes.”

Bergan turned. Miss Thane was standing between the curtains, with her usual expression of calm indifference.

Coralie explained what was wanted. "Would you like it?" she inquired, twining her arm round her friend. "There will be some fine artistic effects."

Miss Thane looked down upon her, with a softness that Bergan had never before seen in her face, and which gave it a marvellous beauty. "I like whatever you like, child," she answered, evasively.

In the hall, she stopped, and took a shawl from the rack.

"Oh, Diva," exclaimed Coralie, "you will not need that, it is so warm."

Miss Thane stood doubtful, with the shawl in her hand. Bergan took it from her quietly, and threw it across his broad shoulder. "It is always safe to carry a shawl, if not to wear it," said he, lightly.

There was no formal arrangement of the party. The path lay through the fields, and was often too narrow to admit more than one person; at other times, partnerships of two or three were formed or broken, very much by chance. A broad glory of moonshine not only lighted them on their way, but surrounded them with enchantment, —softening lines, and deepening shadows, and turning the whole earth into a new creation of silver and ebony.

IV.

A WORD IN DUE SEASON.

ERE long, the shadowy wood-line was reached, and very soon a red twinkle of light became visible through the trees, broadening and brightening as they advanced. The sweet and solemn notes of a hymn, sung by many voices, next pervaded the air; and in a few minutes more, they were standing on the edge of the camp-ground, interested observers of a singularly picturesque scene.

Opposite to them was the speaker's stand, well lighted, covered with evergreen boughs, and affording accommodation to a goodly company of preachers, but too distant to be unpleasantly prominent. Between them and it, the whole vast space was crowded with negro worshippers; some sitting, some kneeling; here, an uncouth figure bowed in an attitude of absorbed meditation (or, it might be, indulging in a peaceful sleep); there, a dusky, upturned face, intent, or agonized, or rapturous, according as the owner was devoutly receptive, torn with conviction of sin, or blissfully assured of pardon. From among them the brown trunks of the forest trees rose straight and shapely as the pillars of a vast temple; and overhead, the under surfaces of the leaves showed gray and spectral against the sombre night sky. Here and there, lanterns were fastened to the trees, but the place was chiefly illuminated by great fires of pitch pine, whence clouds of smoke arose ever and anon, and hung trembling in the tree-tops; and the flames of which, as they rose and fell, cast alternate glow and gloom upon the upturned faces, and seemed to

work corresponding changes of expression,—sudden transitions of joy and sorrow for which there was no apparent cause. Outside of these fires, scattered groups of spectators now came out into bold relief, and now lost themselves in shadow; strong profiles caught the eye, and then vanished; here and there, too, white faces offered an effective contrast to their darker neighbors.

Altogether, it was a picture to delight an artist's eye; yet Miss Thane seemed scarcely to enjoy it. On the way hither she had been silent, shut up within herself, neither seeking nor giving amusement; and she now stood a little apart, letting her eyes rove absently from point to point, but without appearing to take intelligent cognizance of any. Yet she seemed to be listening, after awhile, to the voice of the white-haired negro preacher who occupied the stand, and talked of the comfort of religious faith in a way to argue profound personal knowledge of the subject,—albeit, his phraseology was illiterate, and occasionally absurd, calling a smile to some faces in the party. But Diva did not smile; her thoughts were evidently far below the surface of the subject, in depths where the gleaming ripple of the comic was unfelt and unseen.

The party was considerably scattered. Miss Youle and her friend, tired with their walk, had found a seat on the outermost of the benches, watched over by Judge Emly; the youthful Miss Nina and one of the planters had gone round to get a view from the other side; Coralie stood near a fire, listening to the low comments of Mr. Sypher; and Mr. Youle and Bergan were quite in the background, silent spectators, for the most part, of what was going on.

The white-haired speaker brought his brief address to a close; and a number of negroes quitted the benches and came up the path. Mechanically, Coralie stepped back to make way.

"Take care," exclaimed Mr. Sypher, in a warning voice, "you will catch fire."

But he was too late. She had moved within reach of the draft, and her light muslin robe was wafted into the blaze. Instantly, she felt the heat, saw over her shoulder a rising tongue of flame, and with the insane impulse which usually seizes upon those in like peril, turned to flee from the danger which it was so impossible to distance. But scarcely had she taken a step, before Bergan's strong arm caught her, and flung her, face downward, on the ground; with a deft movement of the other hand and arm, Miss Thane's shawl was shaken out and thrown over her; and, in spite of her frantic struggles, she was held fast by one knee, while he applied both hands to the task of smothering the flames. Miss Thane was the first to come to his aid; then the rest of the party woke from their momentary stupor of alarm, and joined their efforts to hers. In very brief space of time, the work of extinguishment was complete, and Coralie, being lifted to her feet, still enveloped in the friendly shawl, was found to be comparatively uninjured. Her floating curls were singed at the ends, one arm was slightly reddened and smarting, and her nerves were considerably shaken—that was all;—all! where there might so easily have been death, or torture and disfigurement worse than death.

The whole thing had taken place so suddenly and swiftly, that only such persons as were in the immediate vicinity had been aware either of the peril or the rescue; so that it was by chance, as it were, that the whole vast multitude now burst forth with the solemn old Doxology;—

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow.”

The great wave of sound flowed round and over the little breathless party, and charitably veiled or soothed its emotions. Mr. Youle, standing with his arm round his daughter, bowed his face on her head, and a large tear glistened on her soft curls; Miss Youle sank on her knees by the bench where she had been sitting, and wept silently; others

of the party bent their heads, or lifted their hats; Diva Thane held one of Coralie's hands close clasped in hers, but her face was turned away. Suddenly, she threw her voice into the last line of the Doxology,—

“ Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,”

with a richness and power that were like the swell of an organ. It appeared to pervade and sustain the whole chorus of voices, and impressed them inevitably with its own character; which, to Bergan's ear, seemed not so much an expression of thankfulness, as the irresistible outbreak of a feeling that would gladly have given itself the more effectual relief of moaning aloud, had the opportunity been afforded it.

A bystander now considerably offered Mr. Youle the loan of his horse and buggy, and Coralie and her aunt were swiftly driven homeward. The remainder of the party walked back as they had come, Miss Thane and Bergan being in the rear. As they turned into the narrow wood-path, she motioned him to precede her; and he quietly obeyed, understanding, better than she knew, her desire to feel herself free from observation. Yet he failed not to listen for the sound of her light footsteps behind him, and to adapt his pace to hers. Meanwhile, his mind busied itself, almost against his will, with a new and serious question. In the little interval before the starting of the buggy, Coralie had taken his hands in hers, and thanked him for the service rendered her, with a look that haunted him still. There had been nothing in that look but what was most delicate and maidenly,—an involuntary attempt to help out with her eyes the broken words which yet expressed her gratitude so well; nevertheless, it had been possessed of some indefinable quality which had touched him deeply at the time, and now set him gravely to question within himself whether he had any right to be the object of a second look of the kind; at least, while the past was still a deso-

late grave, over which no grass yet grew green, no flowers bloomed. Trained to look difficult questions in the face, stripping them of all confusing or meretricious appendages, it did not take him long to arrive at an emphatic "No," as the only possible answer to this one. Fortunately, he had not committed himself to any particular length of stay at Farview, and the sudden recollection of an important paper that he had locked up in his desk, instead of committing it to the safer guardianship of the fire-proof safe, suggested itself as an excellent excuse for a speedy departure. He decided that he would take his leave early in the morning, and see Coralie no more until he had determined that the past had become so far a dream as to admit of a new dream of the future.

This honorable decision being reached, his mind was sufficiently at ease to allow him to notice that his pace had gradually become a very slow one, in half unconscious conformity to the lagging footsteps behind him,—footsteps which spoke so unmistakably of a troubled mind or an exhausted frame. It even appeared that Miss Thane stopped altogether, now and then, by reason of absorbing thought, or from the necessity of taking breath. Bergan hesitated for a moment, divided between the fear of being intrusive, and the kindly impulse to afford timely help; but the latter prevailed, and, the path having widened somewhat, he turned and offered her his arm. She shook her head absently, at first; then seemed to become suddenly aware that support was needful, and accepted it.

"We are privileged to be silent, I believe," said Bergan, as they moved on together, "only in the presence of strangers or friends. Count me in either category, as you please, and do not trouble yourself to talk. I see you are tired."

"Thank you," returned Miss Thane, in a cool tone of acquiescence.

Across the next two fields, their own linked shadows,

sliding slowly over the ground in advance of them, were not more silent than they. The voices of their companions, who had far outstripped them, reached their ears only in subdued and harmonious murmurs. The moonlight lay over the earth like a visible blessing of peace; and even threw a kind of reflected brightness into Miss Thane's heart, by the aid of which she was better able to try to find some pathway out of its shadows. In that one terrible moment, when she had seemed to see Coralie wrapped in flames, a swift vision of herself, left standing alone in the world—without relative, without friend, without human affection, hope, or solace—a lonely, empty, unsatisfied heart—had risen before her, and left her appalled, even in the midst of her thankfulness that it was only a vision as yet, and not a reality. For, how easily, through the agency of a boat or an engine, a fever or a chill, a thousand every-day accidents, it might still become a reality! With what was she then to supply Coralie's place in her heart and life?

Awhile ago, she would have answered confidently, "With Art." Now, she knew better. For two years she had been testing Art's capacity to fill and satisfy an empty human heart, and her soul was exceeding bitter with the unexpected result. She had painfully experienced the truth (though she could hardly be said to understand it as yet) that he who embraces Art with a thought of self and not of service, will find it turn to ice or to ashes in his arms. In itself, it has neither balm for affliction, nor skilful surgery for remorse, nor sunshine to throw athwart the black gloom of despair.

Out of this bitter knowledge Miss Thane finally spoke, apparently recurring in thought to their previous talk on the piazza;—

"Mr. Arling, how is one to love God, if one does not?"

It was perhaps the most difficult of all questions to

answer. How are the blind eyes to be opened, and the deaf ears unstopped? How is the frozen heart to be softened, and the slumbering affection to be wakened into leaf and bloom? How is the Father to be made acceptable to the children that are insensible of His goodness, and will none of His reproof? And how is the Saviour to be presented unto those to whom He has hitherto been without form or comeliness, in such beauty as that they shall desire Him?

"I think, where it is not spontaneous," Bergan answered, after a moment's consideration, "that such love is most surely to be attained through prayer and service;—a frequent lifting up of the heart to Him whom it would fain love; a constant endeavor to do His will, as the best means of developing and manifesting love."

Miss Thane looked down thoughtfully. "I have known—a man,"—she began slowly, with a shade of irrepressible sadness in her tone,—“a man not less gifted with talent and intellectual power than yourself, and with a somewhat longer and more varied experience in the use of his gifts, who would have laughed at the idea of any virtue in prayer, except as affording a pleasant illusion to a weak mind."

"I, too, have known such a man," replied Bergan, the image of Doctor Remy rising irresistibly before his mind, and causing a dull ache in his heart; "but was he—was this man of whom you speak—or had he ever been, in the devout, habitual use of prayer?"

She shook her head. "I do not know; probably not."

"Miss Thane, you would scarcely need to have me warn you that no man is to be accepted as authority, in law or medicine, who is not thoroughly conversant with the subject, both by study and practice. So those, and those only, who pray themselves, humbly, devoutly, persistently, have any right to pronounce upon the efficacy of prayer."

She looked up at him quickly and keenly. "Pardon me, but—have you the right to speak with authority?"

"In some small measure, yes. I can certify you that the medicine is good, because I have taken it; that the staff is strong, because I have leaned upon it; that the weapon is efficient, because I have fought with it. Allow me to hope that you do not need the certification."

Her eyes fell, and her cheek flushed slightly, but she answered with her usual straightforward candor:—"I was never taught to pray;—my mother died when I was born, and my father believed none of these things. I have no habit of prayer."

"Does no one pray for you?"

"I don't know—Coralie, perhaps."

Bergan looked down upon her, and a sudden moisture dimmed his eyes. His heart was taken complete possession of, for the moment, by a vast, sorrowful pity for this beautiful and gifted woman, who masked so empty and aching a heart with so cold a demeanor, impelling him irresistibly to help her, as he could.

"When you are next asked that question," said he, and there was a deep, rich melody in his voice, "do not say that you 'don't know,' for I promise to put up a prayer for you daily, from henceforth, until you send me word that you have learned to pray habitually and gladly for yourself. Hereafter, when you lie down to rest, remember that another—claiming no title of friend, but simply that of neighbor—has asked forgiveness for your day, protection for your night, and every strength that you need for your morrow."

The proud heart was touched at last. That is to say, Bergan's words were the effectual "last drop" in the full cup of the evening's varied emotions,—comparatively insignificant perhaps in itself, but none the less inevitably productive of overflow. Miss Thane's lips parted with a kind of gasp, scarcely distinguishable as sound, but pro-

foundly suggestive of pain ; and a perceptible tremor ran over her from head to foot. Suddenly releasing Bergan's arm, she sat down on a fallen tree by the side of the path, and covered her face with her hands, while tears, dripping through her slender fingers, glistened gem-like in the moonlight.

Yet it argued much for her power of self-control, that she made no sound, nor shook with any sob. Grief must be content to exercise over her limited, not absolute dominion.

Bergan withdrew to a little distance, and waited silently, looking out over the shadowy valley to the fair, flowing outline of the moon-silvered hills. Those womanly tears, he was certain, would afford most safe and seasonable relief to whatever pain and excitement, whatever distressful memories or dismal forebodings, had resulted from the evening's events. For himself, comparative stranger as he was, he had no right to give Miss Thane more than the silent sympathy of a heart itself not unacquainted with sorrow.

Suddenly, the deep silence was broken by the soft whirr of wings. A bird, flying as straight over the moonlighted fields as if let loose by an unseen hand for that purpose, alighted in the boughs over the two motionless figures, and shook down upon them a shower of liquid notes,—sweet, clear, and joyous,—a very prophecy of hope.

The song being sung, the bird soon spread its wings and flew back to its nest and its mate. Then Diva rose, and held out her hand to Bergan.

"I accept your offer," said she. "Something tells me that the time will come when I can repay you in degree, if not in kind."

And Bergan, as he took the white, cool hand—empty now, except perhaps of a half-reluctant gratitude, and a moderate measure of good-will—had a singular intuition that some day it would be held out to him with an inestimable gift in it.

V.

INTERCEPTED.

“**Y**OU are up early,” said Diva Thane, when she entered Coralie’s room on the morrow, and found her standing by the window, enjoying the fresh, fragrant air, and the innumerable sweet and cheery sounds of the summer morning. “I thought that you would sleep late after your accident,—or what came so near to being one.”

“How could I sleep late, when I was ordered off to bed so early?” rejoined Coralie, smiling brightly, and turning her clear brown eyes on her friend. “Besides, I had so much to think about,” she added, softly and gravely, letting her glance go back to the flower-beds on the lawn.

But it was evident that her reflections, though possibly not without an occasional deep bass note of solemnity, had for the most part sung her a very siren’s song of pleasantness and hope; none the less entrancing because a song without words of definite purport. The smile and the flush, with which she had listened, still brightened her face; and a corresponding light was seen shining from what seemed an interminable depth in her eyes,—eyes never so deeply illumined till now. Indeed, it struck Diva with a kind of vague amaze and sadness, that she had never seen *this* Coralie before! There was an unfamiliar freshness and softness about her, as if she were newly created. The brightness of her face, too, was such as to make her seem more nearly akin to the summer sunshine falling on her through the window, than to mortal shadows and sorrows. In truth, Diva found herself fancying that the sunshine was

a good deal the brighter for the happy glow that it caught from her features.

Surprised, ere long, at Diva's silence, Coralie lifted her eyes, and encountered her friend's intent gaze. Immediately she seemed to become aware that a wonderfully subtle and delicate insight was making, not her face only, but her heart, the subject of its deep regard. The moment before, she did not know that there was anything in either which she cared to hide. Now, as if the existence of some secret were suddenly suggested to her by the fear of another's perception of it, she let her eyes fall, and a deep flush overspread her features.

Diva turned away with a sigh. She felt scarcely less lonely than she had seen herself in the vision of the preceding evening, when Coralie had seemed to be passing swiftly beyond her reach and ken, in a chariot of flame.

Nor was her sadness wholly for herself. She was gifted with a singular clearness of intuition, in regard to the relations of others; and Coralie's face affected her much as it would have done to find a rose suddenly budding out on a sunny winter's day, and mistaking it for the beginning of summer. Still, as is often the case with persons thus endowed, she did not fully trust her own intuitions, for the reason that they could give no clear account of themselves to her intellect. She now told herself, therefore, that her impressions were doubtless wrong, inasmuch as they were destitute of solid basis; she was even glad to believe so, quickly losing the thought of herself in that of her friend. Or it might be that she was seized with a diviner selfishness,—the certainty that, if any winter's night of frost and dusk were in store for Coralie, she herself must needs partake largely, through sympathy, of its chill and gloom.

As the friends stood thus silent, each busy with her own impressions (for they were of much too thin a consistency to be called thoughts), certain sounds from below, coming up to the window, attracted their notice. A

horse was brought round to the side door, and, soon after, Bergan's voice was distinctly heard, speaking to Mr. Youle.

"That will do, thank you. I shall quite enjoy my ride through the valley, this lovely morning. Present my adieux to Miss Coralie; I trust that her night's rest has obliterated every trace of her last evening's experience. Good-bye."

"Why, that is Mr. Arling!" exclaimed Coralie, in sudden consternation. "What can have happened to take him away so suddenly?"

"I heard him telling your father, last night," answered Diva, calmly, "that he would be forced to return to town early this morning on business of importance."

"And he did not bid me good-bye!" murmured Coralie, discontentedly. "Besides, I have not half thanked him for saving me from those dreadful flames,"—and she shuddered at the recollection. "Oh, I *must* speak to him, before he goes."

She leaned out of the window, apparently with the intention of calling to him, but it was too late; he was already trotting down the avenue, followed by the groom who was to bring back the horse. She looked after him with a wistful gaze, and her eyes filled with tears.

Diva watched her thoughtfully,—intent, it would seem, upon some deeper and more perplexing phase of the matter than that immediately presented to her. Finally, she said, as if struck by a sudden thought:—

"If you want to speak to him so much, there is a way. You know the shorter path through the shrubbery to the entrance gate; we can intercept him."

"Oh, no! I could not do that," exclaimed Coralie, shrinking back and blushing deeply, "he would think—that is, it would look like thrusting myself in his way."

"He would think nothing," affirmed Diva, coolly, "except that we are out for a morning walk, as we have a good

right to be; there never was a lovelier sky or earth to tempt one forth. Come, we must be quick."

And, without waiting for consent, or listening to remonstrance, Diva seized Coralie's hand, and hurried her down the stairs, and out through a different door from that by which Bergan had taken his departure,—where Mr. Youle still lingered,—so that they reached the shrubbery unobserved. Here, Diva slackened her pace a little, though she still kept hold of her half reluctant, and nearly breathless companion. They reached the gate before Bergan came in sight.

"Let us go back a little way," pleaded Coralie; "I don't want to be found waiting here."

"Why not?" asked Diva, composedly, seating herself on a low, broad stump by the way-side. "Mr. Arling is not a vain man, he will never suspect us of waiting for *him*. But if you must have an excuse for lingering here,—why, there are some exquisite ferns yonder,—gather them for your parlor vases."

Coralie hesitated, doubtful whether to stay or flee. Diva plucked a dainty leaf of wood-sorrel, and put it between the perfect curves of her own lips.

"Coralie," she suddenly asked, "how old am I?"

Despite her perplexity, Coralie could not help smiling at the absurdity of the question. "Are you losing your memory?" she inquired; "you are two years older than I."

"Oh, is that all? I thought I must have been at least a hundred,—it seemed such an age since I used to eat this green stuff with relish. But *you* are certainly young yet, though you do look a year or two older than you did yesterday."

Coralie quickly stooped over the ferns to hide her deeply-diffused cheeks. Diva continued, apparently without noticing her confusion:—

"However, if the little plant has lost much to the taste,

it has gained more to the eye. I never noticed, in those days, what a delicately outlined leaf, and slender, translucent stem it had, nor how fresh was its tint of green. If Mr. Arling were here, now, he would turn that into a simile,—something about a spiritual sense developed out of an earthly one, or a refined enjoyment only to be attained through some loss of the capacity for commoner pleasures; —isn't that a little in his style? Ah! there he is."

Bergan was looking straight before him, so much absorbed in his own thoughts that he did not see the friends until he was close at hand. He immediately dismounted, flung his bridle to the groom, and came toward them with extended hand.

"So you were going to leave without bidding us good-bye," said Miss Thane, coolly, ignoring the offered hand, but looking him searchingly in the eyes.

If Bergan felt a little embarrassment under that look, he did not betray it.

"I supposed that you were not up," he answered, with perfect composure. "And whoever travels at this season of the year, had best do it betimes in the morning, before the sunbeams are hot as well as bright. Miss Coralie, I am glad to see you looking so fully yourself."

His sentence ended a little abruptly, as if whatever else he had intended to say was suddenly put out of his head. He, too, had become dimly aware of some subtle change or development in Coralie, since the evening before,—a more womanly grace, a new character of beauty; which, however, only served to bring the image of Carice vividly before him—Carice, as he had seen her last, and would never see her again, under the shadowy pines, by the dreaming river, with the newborn love-light in her eyes, and the dawn-rose of love in her cheeks. Scarce knowing what he did, he lifted his hand, to see if, haply, he might shut out both images together.

Coralie's eyes fell on that hand, which was carefully

bandaged from wrist to knuckles ; and the unconquerable shyness which had seized her, on Bergan's appearance, was instantly dissipated.

"What is that?" she asked ;—"oh, Mr. Arling, were you burned last night in trying to save me?"

Bergan looked at Diva and smiled. "It is nothing," said he, lightly,—“only your aunt and Miss Thane insisted upon binding it up after I got home ; and the least that I can do is to wear their kindly handiwork for a day or two.”

"Oh, Diva," exclaimed Coralie reproachfully, the quick moisture coming into her eyes, "why did you not tell me?"

"Why should I?" replied Diva, with somewhat bitter emphasis ; "*hands* heal quickly."

"Miss Thane is quite right," said Bergan ; "the matter was not worth mentioning. Certainly, it was not worth one of those tears, Miss Coralie ; you will make me too proud of having gotten a small scratch in the fray. If it were ten times as much, it would in nowise offset what I owe your father. Now I must bid you farewell, or I shall miss the train."

"Will you not come up again soon?" asked Coralie, coloring a little, but strong in the certainty that she could not err in showing her preserver the most cordial courtesy. "It must be good for you to leave the city as often as you can. And you have certainly earned the right to consider Farview as your home, whenever it suits you to do so."

"Thank you," said Bergan, bowing in acknowledgment of the kind and thoughtful invitation. "But I am necessarily a busy and homeless man, and it is the truest wisdom for me not to stray too far out of my proper orbit, lest I get dissatisfied with it. When I become more fully and firmly settled therein, a day's absence may not matter so much ; and then, if your invitation still holds good, I shall be only too happy to avail myself of it."

"It must always hold good, just as a kindness once

done is done forever," replied Coralie warmly, turning a deaf ear to the unseasonable inner voice that cried out against the coolness and reserve of Bergan's response, and holding out a tremulous little hand, by way of signature and seal to her promise.

Bergan gave the hand a friendly pressure, and bowed low to Miss Thane. "A pleasant summer to you both," said he, "full of flowers and sunshine, both material and metaphorical. Farewell."

He lifted his hat as he rode through the gate; very soon a turn of the road hid him from sight. Coralie stood looking somewhat wistfully at the point where he had disappeared.

"Peace go with him!" said Diva lightly. "He was in a great hurry to leave us, but he said 'Farewell' in a way to indicate that he should not be in a hurry to return. Fortunately, we are not the sort of damsels to pine after an unwilling knight."

Coralie turned instantly, and, with heightened color, signified her readiness to go home.

For some days her spirits were fitful and changeable; nothing now so gay, nothing now so sad, as her smile. During this time Diva watched over her with a silent, patient, careful devotion that surrounded her like the atmosphere, viewless, but beneficent. She saved her from annoyance; she shielded her from observation; she stood between her and her guests, taking up the burden of their entertainment in a way that would have seemed incredible to those accustomed to see her only languidly indifferent or coldly haughty. Though her heart might be narrow, it was certainly deep.

By and by, Coralie began to smile naturally once more, and Diva was satisfied that, though the rose could not "shut and be a bud again," it had received no lasting blight. If it could be kept from further harm, it might be expected to develop naturally into perfection of bloom and

beauty,—not the hasty and one-sided maturity that comes of a worm at the heart.

She could now think of herself. Unselfish anxiety and effort had been very good for her thus far, there was not a doubt of that. Nevertheless, she was beginning to feel urgent need of quiet,—opportunity to commune with her own heart, and be still,—time to deal justly and thoroughly with questions seething in her mind ever since her talks with Bergan. But it was vain to look for quiet at Farview; the house was fast filling up with gay guests; and having once dropped her ice-mantle of reserve, she could not resume it without giving pain to her hosts. So, as Coralie was now quite capable of taking her rightful place as queen of the festivities, and as she had already stayed twice as long as had been contemplated at first, Diva went back to her studio.

VL

AN AIMLESS STROLL.

LATE one afternoon, about a month after Bergan's return to Savalla, he quitted the office, which seemed to have grown unaccountably barren and dreary of aspect, and set out for an aimless stroll through the city. The air was fresh and moist from a recent shower, and the slanting sunbeams were working alchemic wonders in the streets and squares ; turning the polished leaves of the oak and olive trees to silver, and hanging them with prismatic jewels, enriching the grass with a vivid green, and the earth with a rich golden brown, and imprinting the sensitive surface of every tiny rain-pool with a lovely picture of blue sky, fleecy clouds, and pendent sprays of foliage.

Through all these pleasant sights Bergan moved slowly and half absently, occupying himself less with their beauty than with the sober monologue of his own thoughts. Yet his gaze was not without occasional moments of intelligence, and in one of these he noticed a child, attended by a large dog, standing with a curiously doubtful, undecided air, in the midst of the square that he was crossing. Suddenly making up her mind, it would seem, she held out her hand to a gentleman coming from the opposite direction, who took no further notice of the mute appeal than was implied by a shake of the head. The sight was a comparatively strange one in those days, when begging was resorted to as an occasional resource, rather than followed as a regular trade ; and Bergan continued to observe the child with a certain degree of interest, though not with a wholly unpreoccupied mind, as he advanced toward her.

All at once, it struck him that there was something oddly familiar about her slender little figure. As for the dog, he was certainly an old acquaintance, as could easily be proven; and Bergan's lips emitted a low, peculiar whistle. There was an instant pricking up of the canine ears, and an inquisitive turning sidewise of the canine head, but the faithful animal would not leave his young mistress until he was absolutely certain that he recognized a friend. She, meanwhile, seemed to notice neither the whistle nor its effect; nor could she distinctly see what manner of man drew near, her eyes being dazzled by the level sun-rays, but she again mutely held out her hand.

It was instantly taken possession of. "Cathie," said Bergan, wonderingly, "what does this mean?"

She looked at him a moment in blank bewilderment, but ended by recognizing him and flinging herself into his arms exactly as the Cathie of a year before would have done; but with a deep, long-drawn, repressed sob, implying a profounder sorrow than had ever darkened the horizon of even that child of many and incomprehensible moods.

Yet Bergan was considerably relieved by her first words;—"Oh, Mr. Arling, don't tell mamma—don't tell Astra—please don't!" It seemed probable that the episode of the begging was simply one of the child's strange freaks.

"Did you do it for fun, then?" he asked.

"Fun?" repeated Cathie, with indignant emphasis, "do you think it's fun to beg, Mr. Arling? *I* don't. I was so ashamed that I wanted to hide my face with both hands."

"Then why did you do it?" asked Bergan, gravely.

The child's lip assumed its most sorrowful curve. "To get some money to give Astra," she answered. "We are very poor now; the Bank went and got broke, with all mamma's money in it; and she was taken sick, and Astra couldn't get much to do, and we've had to move into a

little mean house, in a dirty little street, where there are no flowers, nor trees, nor anything that's nice. And this morning I saw Astra take the last money out of her purse, to pay the rent, and she looked—oh! I can't tell how she looked,—something like that big gray man, with the little boy on his back, that she made so long ago; and I did so wish that I could do something to help her, just a little bit. So, when she sent me out to take a walk with Nix, it came into my head that I could beg for her, if I couldn't do anything else, and I thought I'd try it. Was it doing wrong?"

Bergan did not answer except by stooping to kiss the child's upturned face. His eyes grew moist.

"I know it must be wrong," pursued Cathie, innocently, "if it makes you cry, Mr. Arling."

"No, Cathie," replied Bergan, smiling reassuringly. "I do not think it was wrong,—at least, you did not mean to do wrong, and that makes a great difference. But I don't think that you will need to try it again. Now, certainly you can do something better; that is, take me home with you."

On the way, Cathie, secure in the sympathy of this trusted friend of better days, gave a more detailed account of the misfortunes that had befallen the little family, since it left Berganton. His heart ached as he pictured to himself the weary and wasting struggle with poverty that Astra had maintained so bravely, yet so hopelessly; heavily weighted, on the one hand, with the burden of disappointed affection, and, on the other, with the anxiety caused by her mother's severe illness. For works of art, there had been no demand; for portrait busts and medallions, there had been only a scanty and fitful one. Her last resource had been pupils in drawing, but these had now failed her, in consequence of the usual summer exodus of the city's wealthier population; by reason of which she was reduced to the bitter straits shadowed forth by Cathie's earlier communications. It was touching, too, to see what real

nobleness of character had all along been hidden under the child's caprice and waywardness, as evinced by the fact that she said little of the privations that had fallen to her own lot, but dwelt chiefly on her mother's lack of accustomed comforts, and the forlorn face that Astra wore, when out of that mother's sight.

The house was reached before the story had come to an end. It was a little better than Bergan's fears, but far worse than his hopes. It smote him to the heart to contrast it with the comfortable and spacious mansion that had opened its doors so readily to him at Berganton, and wherein he had come to feel himself so pleasantly at home.

Cathie ushered Bergan into the dingy little room that served both for parlor and studio, and then rushed through the opposite door, full of the importance of the news that she had to impart. There was a smothered exclamation of surprise from the adjoining room, followed by a murmured consultation; and then Astra appeared in the doorway.

But it was by no means the Astra of Bergan's remembrance. The features were the same, to be sure, but the light, the hope, the energy, that had animated them, and informed them with such rich and varied expression, was utterly lacking. There was a perceptible line between the eyebrows, as if the brow were wont to be knit over difficult problems; and the mouth expressed a settled melancholy, which a smile seemed only to vary slightly, not to displace. Nor could Bergan help detecting a little hardness in it,—the look of a defeated general, forced to lay down his weapons, but still unsubdued in will.

What he most marvelled at, however, was that it immediately brought Diva Thane's face before him, as if there were some subtle relation between them, though there was not the slightest resemblance.

Astra's manner to him was scarcely less altered than her face. It was not exactly cold, but it lacked much of the old warmth and heartiness. Bergan took no notice of

it; he readily divined what chords of painful association were thrilled at the sight of him, and how inevitably her pride revolted against being seen in her present surroundings. Her hand was so cold, when he took it in his, that he pressed it between both his own, with a vague idea of warming it; then, stirred by a sympathy too deep for ordinary expression, he bent over and touched it with his lips.

"You are not wise," said Astra, with a faint smile; "you should not do homage to a fallen princess."

"Neither do I," rejoined Bergan, with a deep music in his voice. "She is not fallen, but holding out most bravely against the time when she may expect succor."

"Succor?" responded Astra, with a mixture of pride and mournfulness,—“from what or whom could acceptable succor come?”

Bergan smiled, and pointed upward. "From the Source of all succor, whatever be the channel."

Astra shook her head, and the lines of her mouth grew set and hard. "Acceptable succor comes in season," said she, "and through legitimate channels."

Bergan was confounded. This lack of faith, this arraignment of Providence, argued a more amazing change in Astra than he had yet suspected. At the same time it afforded him a clue to that mysterious connection, in his mind, between her face and Miss Thane's. Under the hardness of the one and the coldness of the other, the same scepticism lay hidden,—possibly engendered by similar causes. In Astra's case, he had no hesitation in attributing it to Doctor Remy's influence; and he could not but wonder at the singular and fatal power of the man over the minds of those who were brought into close contact with him. Was this deadly poison to be also instilled into the pure mind of Carice? He shuddered at the thought. Better for her to lie dead at the bottom of the river, by which he had last seen her soft, rapt face.

Feeling that this was no time to argue with Astra, Bergan turned to the table, which was littered with drawings and sketches, plaster reliefs, and small clay models, to a degree that implied no lack of patient industry, despite the want of encouragement, and the absence of faith.

"What are you doing?" he asked.

"Nothing, just now," she answered, mournfully. "I believe my hands have lost their cunning,—if ever they had any. That is the last." She pointed to a small bas-relief.

It represented a child, skipping lightly down a flowery slope, trailing a vine behind her. The face was turned so far away from the beholder, as to show only the rounded outline of the youthful cheek and brow, but the figure expressed a wonderful joyousness. In more senses than one, it was plainly, "In the Sunshine;" which title was lightly scratched in the plaster.

Bergan studied it attentively. "It is as fresh as a rose," said he, "and as sweet."

"The analogy, if there be any, goes deeper than that," rejoined Astra, bitterly. "A rose is born out of darkness and dampness and decay, and this is the offspring of pain and discouragement, and all that makes the hand weak and the heart sick."

"And that is probably the secret of its perfection," remarked Bergan, meditatively. "The loveliest graces of character—such as charity that thinketh no evil, and hope that lives by faith, not by sight—are the legitimate children of suffering. Then why not the finer works of art?"

Astra's eyes fell, and she did not answer.

"At any rate," pursued Bergan, "this 'Sunshine' is just what I want to brighten my office. I was thinking, this very day, that something must be done to make it less dismal. I suppose it is for sale?"

Astra bent her head a little stiffly. She doubted the reality of this new-born desire for office decorations.

He took out his purse, and laid a folded bank-note on the table. He expected that she would not look at it, until after he had gone, but she immediately took it up, opened it, and tendered it back to him.

"It is too much," said she proudly. And her look added, "I am no beggar."

"Is it?" inquired Bergan, with apparent surprise. "I thought it agreed tolerably well with the prices that you used to mention as the least you would receive for your works, in the future."

"I have lived to grow wiser," replied Astra.

"It is all the same," rejoined Bergan composedly, "I was about to say that, as my mother has long been entreating me to send her some sort of a portrait, it occurs to me that I cannot do better than to get you to make a medallion or a bust of me, whichever you please. The balance of the note can go toward the first payment. We will arrange for the sittings, as soon as you are at leisure."

Astra's lip trembled. Put in this way, the note might be retained; and no one knew so well as herself what an amount of relief to her, and of comfort to her mother, it ensured. But her pride was very sore, nevertheless, and her face was little grateful, as she dropped the note on the table, somewhat as if it had burned her fingers.

Bergan hastened to change the subject. "I am sorry not to see your mother," he began; but Astra interrupted him.

"She would like to see you very much," said she, "if you don't mind coming to her room. It is several days since she has left it; though I really think that she is better to-day."

"Why should I mind?" asked Bergan, smiling. "*She* used to call me her son sometimes; though you do take such pains to give me to understand that you utterly repudiate me as a brother."

Astra turned her face aside, to conceal the sudden un-

bending of the set mouth. "Indeed, I do not," she faltered.

Bergan drew her toward him, just as a brother would have done. "Then you will help me to persuade her to move into more comfortable quarters, at once. I promise you that it shall be arranged so carefully as to give her the least possible fatigue."

Astra shook her head. "It cannot be; it would excite her too much. Her disease is of the heart; and joy kills as surely as sorrow. When I moved her here,—being imperatively forced to do so, because I could not afford to stay where we were,—I determined that, let come what would, she should not be stirred again, until she is a great deal better or—worse. Thank you for the kind thought, but indeed she is best off here, for the present,—now that I have the means of making her tolerably comfortable."

In the last sentence, there was some trace of Astra's old self; and, glad to have gained thus much, Bergan followed her to Mrs. Lyte's bedside.

If he still cherished any belief in the feasibility of removing her, it vanished with the first sight of her face. He wondered what could have led Astra to think her better. Even to his inexperienced eyes, the struggling breath, the beaded forehead, the ashy pallor, indicated but too plainly that the thread of her life was wellnigh spun.

Yet she was less changed, in some respects, than Astra. Her smile had the old sweetness; her face—when the excitement caused by his unexpected visit was calmed a little, and she could breathe easier—had the old expression of gentle resignation. It lighted up, too, at sight of him;—as he had reminded Astra, she had come to regard him with a half-motherly affection, during his residence in her house.

"It is very good of you to come to us," she said, gratefully; "it seems a great while since I have seen any friendly face."

"If I had only known that you were in Savalla, I should have come much sooner," answered Bergan.

"And if I had known that *you* were here," she responded, "I should certainly have sent for you. It is strange, Astra, that we never happened to hear of him."

Astra's face flushed a little. "We are not in the way of hearing news," she replied, evasively. "But now that he is here, to sit with you a few minutes, I will run out and get that prescription filled, which the doctor left this morning."

Bergan rose instantly. "Let me go, rather," said he.

"No, no," said Mrs. Lyte, "it will do her good to have a little run. Besides, I want to talk with you."

Bergan sat down again, and Cathie nestled to his side. Nix, too, came and lay down at his feet, quite in the old Berganton fashion.

"I am very glad to see you," continued Mrs. Lyte, when Astra had left the room, "but I am afraid it is largely a selfish gladness. I am so certain that you will see what can be done for my children after I am gone."

Bergan opened his lips to speak, but she lifted her hand with a deprecating gesture, and went on:—

"Let me say what I want to say; I shall be so much easier in my mind. Do you know how we came to leave Berganton?"

"I do not; I only heard of it when I went back there, in the Fall."

Mrs. Lyte briefly explained the circumstances which had led to the removal. She stated, furthermore, that she had written to Major Bergan, upon the failure of the Bank where her money was invested, and inquired if he had sold the house, and whether there was any balance in her favor. To which he replied that he had done nothing about the matter, and proposed to do nothing, at present; he only wished that she would come back, and live in it, as before. But this was impossible, she had now no means of maintain-

ing so large and expensive a place. She had, therefore, written again, to the effect that she asked nothing better than the immediate foreclosure of the mortgage, and the sale of the property. Would he attend to it at his earliest convenience, and forward her the balance? To this letter there had been no reply; she took it for granted that a purchaser had not been found. What she desired of Bergan, in the event of her death, which she believed to be near at hand, was to hurry forward the sale of the place, and secure something for Astra, if possible. This he promised to do; and he added, in a tone that brought instant conviction to her mind, and tears of gratitude to her eyes, that, however this matter terminated, neither Astra nor Cathie should lack friendly aid, at need.

When he finally took his leave, Bergan beckoned Astra to the door. "Are you alone here?" he inquired. "Is there no one to share your labors and your cares?"

"We brought our old Chloe with us," replied Astra; "she would not be left behind, and indeed, I do not know what we should have done without her. But lately the good old creature has insisted upon going out to do a day's washing, now and then, to bring something into the family purse; she is out to-day. When she is home, she does all she can."

Bergan recollected the old slave, and doubted nothing of her fidelity. But, in the woful event that he foresaw, Astra would need other help, other sympathy, he thought.

"Is there no one you can send for,—no relative, no friend, in Berganton, or elsewhere?" he persisted.

"None," replied Astra. "And what accommodations have we for such a friend, if we had one?"

There was nothing more to be said. He shook her hand warmly, told her that he had promised her mother to come again on the morrow, lifted his hat, with his usual courtesy, and went down the street, in such a maze of pity and perplexity, that he forgot to notice which way he went.

When he became cognizant of his whereabouts, he was standing before a large, old-fashioned mansion fronting on one of the principal squares of the city. On the door was a silver plate, bearing the name of "DIVA THANE, ARTIST."

VII.

ORDERED STEPS.

BERGAN was much struck with the fact that his aimless walk—aimless, at least, so far as his own intention was concerned—had first led him, in virtue of his meeting with Cathie, to Mrs. Lyte's bedside, and next to the studio of Miss Thane. Accepting both these leadings as parts of the same providential plan, though he could discern but the slightest possible relation between them, he knocked at the studio door.

"Come in!" was the immediate response, in Miss Thane's clear, cold monotone.

Bergan pushed open the door, which was a little ajar, and found himself in the presence of the artist. She was standing at her easel, palette and brushes in hand; and she waited to give several touches to her work, before turning toward her visitor.

If she felt any surprise at sight of him, her face betrayed none. Yet it seemed to Bergan that some change had come over that face since he beheld it last—a certain suggestion of weariness under its languor, of dissatisfaction under its chill pride—which he accepted as a good augury for the task that he had in hand.

Miss Thane seemed to divine, at once, that his visit had some object other than the pleasure of seeing either herself or her pictures. After a few quiet words of greeting, she rested one hand upon her easel, and stood waiting, calm, proud, and exceeding beautiful, to be informed of its nature.

Bergan was scarcely prepared to make known his errand

so abruptly. He had promptly entered the studio, in obedience to his first impulse; but he had counted upon some little time thereafter to arrange his thoughts and feel his way, some flow of conversation to be duly turned to his advantage, or some clue to the deep mystery of Miss Thane's sympathies,—possibly, too, some further light upon the inscrutable design of Providence, in sending him hither.

After all, was not the most straightforward course likely to be the best one?

"Miss Thane," said he, gravely, "my own volition has had so little to do with bringing me here, that I scarcely know why I am come. But I believe that it is to try to interest you in a sister artist—a sculptor—who is in sore need of aid that you might give her."

Miss Thane put her hand into her pocket, and drew out her purse; but before she could open it, Bergan stopped her with a deprecating gesture.

"Pardon me," said he, "but *that* sort of aid, I can give myself, if it be necessary."

"What am I to do, then?" asked Miss Thane, wonderingly.

"Whatever one delicate, refined, large-hearted woman can do for another, in the way of cheer, encouragement, sympathy, and consolation."

Miss Thane gave him a long look out of her deep eyes, partly surprised, partly meditative.

"What put it into your head to come to *me* on such an errand?" she finally asked, with a singular, half satirical emphasis.

"Because when I was wondering to whom I could go," answered Bergan, "I found myself standing before your door. Because you did me the honor, two weeks ago, to ask me a certain question, and I thought that this might be the beginning of a better answer than I was able to give you."

Miss Thane slowly walked to the other end of the room,

and fixed her eyes on the deep red gold of the western horizon, whence the sun still shed a soft posthumous influence over the earth.

"What does it matter," she murmured to herself, "if I do surrender somewhat of my freedom? I have had a fair trial of an isolated life—divested of every irksome bond, burden, and duty, shut up to the one friend that I trust, and the one occupation that I love—and what has it done for me? Absolutely nothing; except to make me daily colder in heart, and narrower in mind. Is it not time to try something else?"

She turned back to Bergan, and her face, though it was still weary, was no longer proud.

"I am sensible of the honor that you have done me," said she, with unusual gentleness; "I will try to deserve your good opinion. Where am I to find the lady of whom you speak, and in what way can I render her the most essential service?"

Bergan quietly placed a chair for her.

"Sit down," said he, "and let me tell you the whole story; at least, as far as I know it myself."

As he talked, the gold faded out of the sky, and the gray twilight shadows crept into the room, turning the pictures on the walls into pale, vague outlines, and giving a wonderful softness to Miss Thane's listening face. Nor did the story end until the pictures had become indistinguishable masses of shadow, and nothing was left of the face but its deep, lustrous eyes. Its owner had not once spoken; and it quite escaped Bergan's notice, in the dimness, that she gave a sudden, violent start when Mrs. Lyte's full name was mentioned.

"Thus, you see," he concluded, "it is not only a disappointed, discouraged, anxious heart (soon, alas! to become a mourning one) that I commend to your tender sympathies, but a sorely wounded faith. If you cannot heal the latter, do not, I charge you, help to destroy it."

"I will not," answered she, solemnly ; "I promise you that I will not. How could I, when I am half inclined to believe that such faith—unfounded, illusory though it be—is a better thing than any reality that we exchange it for."

Bergan slightly lifted his eyebrows. "May I ask," said he, quietly, "to what reality, or realities, you refer?"

"You press me hard," answered she, bitterly, after a pause ; "none, none that I can think of just now. Everything seems vague, unreal, unsubstantial."

"Fall back on faith," returned Bergan, smiling. "If it be not a reality itself, it works realities. It fosters real virtues, and inspires real heroism ; by it men live nobly, and die courageously. What reality can do more for them,—indeed, what one does so much?"

He waited for a moment, expecting an answer. Seeing that none came, he bowed, and left her sitting there, gazing out into the silent night.

On the following morning, Astra was in her studio, busily plying her needle, while her mother slept, when there came a light knock on the door. Opening it, she found herself face to face with a lady of such rare and remarkable beauty, that she stood motionless, lost in wonder and admiration.

The stranger bent her head with the stately, yet friendly, grace of one princess to another ; and a smile just touched her lips, and then seemed to sink into her eyes, shining farther and farther down in their clear depths, until it vanished from sight.

"Will you allow me the pleasure of looking into your studio?" asked she, in a voice as perfect as her face ; "I have heard so much of its marvels, that I am desirous of seeing them for myself."

Astra mutely made way ; her visitor glided into the room, cast a quick, comprehensive glance around, and sat down in front of the statue of Mercury.

"Do not let me interrupt you," she said to Astra, "but

just go on with whatever you are about, and allow me to study this at my leisure."

Astra hesitated a moment, and then took up the work that she had dropped,—one of Cathie's much-enduring aprons, that she was trying to darn into some semblance of respectability. But she could not help stealing an occasional glance at the clear-cut profile of her guest, until, all her artistic instincts being thoroughly aroused, she was fain to seize upon crayon and cardboard, and make sure of the lovely outline, ere it should vanish, as she expected it would soon do, utterly and forever from her sight.

The guest, meanwhile, studied the Mercury in profound silence. Yet Astra soon felt that an uncommonly deep and delicate discernment was brought to bear on her work, capable of accurately measuring both its excellences and its faults. There was something inspiriting in the very thought,—it was so seldom that her sculpture was favored with a really intelligent glance! Her eyes brightened, her hands recovered their cunning, the crayon sketch grew into lifelikeness without effort, almost without consciousness, save when she stopped to marvel, now and then, at its exceeding beauty and delicacy. Yet it did no more than justice to the original,—scarcely that, indeed;—where did she get that face, and who could she be!

She had left the Mercury now, after a few—a very few words of commendation, yet spoken so cordially and discriminately as to be worth volumes of ordinary praise to Astra; and she was looking gravely into the upturned eyes of the Cherub. Glancing from it to its creator, she said, with a faint smile;—

"I wish you could put *that* look into my face."

Astra shook her head. "I could not put it anywhere *now*," she answered, drearily.

The stranger gave her a compassionate glance. "I wonder," said she, musingly, "whether it is better to have had such faith and lost it, or never to have had it at all."

"It is better to have lost it," replied Astra quickly, and with a slight shudder. "One can live in the hope of finding it again."

The visitor sighed, and turned to look at the sketches on the wall.

By and by, she slid easily into a discourse about various art-matters; holding Astra spellbound, for awhile, with the fluent richness of her diction, and the extent of her knowledge. Nor was Astra allowed to listen only. A certain graphic portrayal of art-life in Italy having stirred her to the depths, and kindled the old fire and energy of enthusiasm in her eyes, she was skilfully drawn on to talk of herself and her work, her aims, longings, limitations, and needs, as she had never talked before, because she had never before met with so understanding and sympathetic an auditor.

In the midst of one of her animated sentences, a low moan was heard from the inner room. "Excuse me," said Astra hurriedly, amazed to see how completely she had forgotten her cares, fears, and griefs, in the magic of the stranger's presence,— "Excuse me, I must go to my mother."

Mrs. Lyte had waked, as was too often the case, in a spasm of pain. Astra hastened to call Cathie from the kitchen to assist the laboring breath with gentle wafts of air from a fan, while she herself measured some drops of a soothing mixture, and lifted her mother's head on her arm, to enable her to swallow and to breathe more easily. Several anxious moments had passed thus, in silence broken only by the painful respirations of the invalid, when a low, sweet strain of melody stole so gently into the room that Astra could not tell, at first, from whence it came. So soft was it that it melted into the ear without making any apparent demand upon the attention, yet so clear that not one liquid note was lost. The swollen veins of Mrs. Lyte's forehead subsided; her chest ceased its agonized heaving; a peaceful, happy smile broke over her face.

"What is it?" she asked, wonderingly, when the strain ended,—not abruptly, but gradually growing fainter, until it was impossible to tell just at what point sound became silence.

Astra whispered softly that she had left a strange visitor in the studio, who appeared to be singing unconsciously to herself.

"If she would only sing again!" murmured Mrs. Lyte, wistfully.

With her usual impulsiveness, Cathie rushed to the studio door. "Mamma wishes you would sing—" she began, and then stopped short, no less surprised and fascinated by the face that met her gaze than her sister had been.

The stranger reflected for a moment, then her voice again pervaded the air, as with the very soul of restful melody. As she sang, the child moved slowly toward her, drawn as irresistibly as the magnet to the loadstone, till she stood close to her side, encircled by her arm, and gazing at her with round, wondering eyes. As the song ceased, she slid her hand half-curiously, half-timidly over her shoulder.

"Have you wings?" she asked, earnestly. "Did you fly down?"

Before the visitor could reply, except by a swift expression of something like pain that flitted across her face, Astra appeared in the doorway.

"Mother wishes to see you, and thank you," she said. "Will you step this way?"

The lady rose, and moved quietly into the inner room. At sight of her face, Mrs. Lyte gave a violent start; the thanks she was about to speak died on her lips; she could only cry out in amazement;—"Who are you?"

The stranger knelt by the bedside, and took both Mrs. Lyte's hands in her soft, cool grasp. "I am the daughter of your runaway sister, Aunt Katie," she answered, "and my name is Godiva Thane."

"But she died, and she left no child," said Mrs. Lyte, incredulously.

"She died in giving me birth," returned Diva, with convincing positiveness. "I have long suspected that my father did not let you know, he never forgot the opposition to his marriage; besides, he was jealous of his only child's affections. You must needs forgive him,—for he is dead."

Several questions followed, on Mrs. Lyte's part; to which Diva gave long, detailed answers, skilfully contrived to satisfy her aunt's curiosity, tranquillize her emotions, and bring her, in a brief space, to a tolerably peaceful and composed state of mind.

"Can I do anything for you before I go?" she then asked.

"Nothing, dear, unless you will sing to me—a hymn; there are tones in your voice which are more soothing than any anodyne."

Diva put her hand to her brow, and sent her thoughts back—a long, long way, it seemed to her—to a period in her childhood, when she had been under the care of a certain faithful nurse, afterwards discharged by her father for putting foolish, superstitious notions—as he averred—into her head. There she found two or three hymns; keeping tenacious hold of her memory, in virtue of their early grafting therein; which she sang in such soft, even tones, that Mrs. Lyte was first calmed, and then irresistibly lulled to sleep.

The two cousins stole out of the room together. In the studio, Diva put her arms around Astra and kissed her tenderly.

"Having found you, my little cousin, my art sister," said she, smiling, "I shall never let you go!"

VIII.

THOUGH HE SLAY.

MISS THANE had all along understood that a meeting with her mother's only and twin sister, either by accident or design, was quite within the scope of possibilities. She had even regarded it as perhaps the brightest prospect which the future afforded her, in case her present experiment in life should fail to give her satisfaction, or her heart should suddenly utter an importunate cry for that cup of cold water of human affection, which is only to be tasted in the society of one's own kin. Amid the gray monotony of her existence, she had often pictured that meeting to herself in a variety of pleasant coloring and dramatic shapes ; but never, it is safe to say, in the solemn lights and sober shadows in which it finally took its place among the memorable scenes of her life.

Yet in no other way could it have operated so powerfully to awaken the instinct of kinship within her, to melt her reserve, to draw out her dormant sympathies,—in short, to call forth whatever was deepest, richest, and womanliest in her nature. And certainly, in no other way could it have brought so strong and subtle an influence to bear upon the sombre doubts and chill infidelities of her mind ; setting over against her cool, speculative belief in a blind Chance or an inflexible Fate, Mrs. Lyte's calm trust in the goodness of God's providence, against the blighting, chilling, unbeauteous effects of suffering on her own heart, the gracious fruitage of patience, contentment, and love, ripening under its touch in Mrs. Lyte's, against her own dim outlook into an unknown future, her aunt's firm

expectation of the eternal weight of glory. The contrast was too striking not to be noticed, its testimony in favor of faith over unbelief too strong to be ignored. Daily, as she watched by her aunt's bedside, questions that she had once settled, or laid aside as incapable of settlement, came up again, to be examined in new and diviner lights. Daily the good work which Bergan had been instrumental in beginning in her heart, went forward,—not like the work of doubt, tearing down what it could not rebuild, and taking away bread to give a stone,—but bringing order out of confusion, proportion out of inequality, solidity out of disintegration.

On the other hand, her advent was no less beneficial, in its way, to her aunt and cousins. Not to speak of the material comforts and luxuries which she managed so delicately to introduce into the sick-room, as to make them seem much like direct gifts of Providence, without any intervening hand, she brought into their forlorn, narrow, monotonous life an element of variety and interest, as well as of personal helpfulness, that was sorely needed. Mrs. Lyte soon grew to depend upon her constant presence and care scarcely less than upon Astra's. She never wearied of searching her beautiful face for fitful touches of resemblance to the darling twin sister, whose runaway marriage and subsequent death had been the great grief of her own earlier years, nor of drawing out such facts in relation to that sister's short married life, and Diva's birth, as the latter had been able to gather from others, and store in her memory. She was deeply interested, too, in Diva's own history,—her motherless childhood, her long sojourn in Europe, her art studies, her reasons for the isolated life that she had been leading of late. Especially did she delight in hearing her sing. Diva might busy herself in whatever part of the house's narrow precinct she pleased, if only her voice floated into the sick-room, and sweetened the air with the notes and words of some favorite "hymn of the ages," or the soft

Italian melodies that she had learned in their native land. While the lovely voice kept on, Mrs. Lyte lay lapped in smiling content, or slept in perfect tranquillity, lulled more effectually than by any anodyne.

Nor was Astra any less ready to accept her kinswoman as a timely boon and blessing. It was not only an unspeakable relief to feel a part of her heavy burden of care lifted from her shoulders by hands so willing, so tender, and with so undoubted a right to the privilege; it was also a rare delight to have such thoroughly congenial companionship. As for Cathie, her heart was easily won,—all the more that she never seemed to quite rid herself of her first impression that the new-comer was celestial rather than human, and to be adored accordingly. In short, Diva soon found for herself so fit, definite, and essential a place in all these hearts and lives as to suggest the idea that it must have been prepared expressly, and kept waiting for her—she knew not how long. Nay, more,—*she* must have been prepared for *it*; carefully fitted, by many sad and stern circumstances, for this exchange of helpful influences, for her part in that solemn symphony of events which was rolling its profound harmonies through Mrs. Lyte's sick-chamber.

For the invalid did not rally. After one week of apparent pause, her life's lapse went steadily on. Day by day, she weakened and wasted; day by day, the spirit loosened its mortal garments, and made itself ready to put on immortality; day by day, her mind let go something of earthly cares, anxieties, wishes, and fears, and fixed itself more firmly upon the Rock of Ages, and the rest that remaineth. Nothing of life seemed left, by and by, but love; making manifest, by this true "survival of the fittest," its Divine origin and destiny.

One summer afternoon, when the sun was flooding all the earth and sky with the glory of his departure, Bergan knocked at the door of Astra's studio, according to his daily habit, to inquire if he could be of any service. No

answer being returned to his knock, he let himself in and went softly to the bedroom door. A scene too beautiful to be called sad, though infinitely solemn, met his view.

Astra was seated on the bed, holding her mother in her arms, to afford her a grateful change of position. Cathie lay curled up at the invalid's feet, with her large eyes fixed on the rapt, hushed face,—the half-closed eyes and slightly parted lips, of which suggested a soft sinking into that sweet slumber, which is yet not so much slumber as a happy dream. Diva knelt by the bedside, with her aunt's hand in hers, singing in tones that thrilled him through and through, much as he had learned in these days, of the marvellous beauty and pathos of her voice;—

“When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold Thee on Thy Throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!”

As the last note died away, he stepped forward and lifted the unconscious form from Astra's arms. She looked up at him wonderingly.

“The earthly hymn was very sweet,” said he gently, “but the song of the redeemed in Paradise is sweeter still.”

Still she seemed not to understand. What words were at once tender and solemn enough for the full explanation? None but those of inspiration; at once old and fresh; having poured their balm all along down through the centuries, yet falling on each newly bereaved heart, as if still moist and cool with the dew of their birth. Reverently he quoted:—

“‘Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them.’”

Mrs. Lyte was taken to Berganton, and laid in the churchyard by her husband's side, amid much kindred dust.

Bergan accompanied the small funeral train to within two or three miles of the village, and then turned back; in obedience to Astra's wish, as expressed to him through Diva Thane. The poor girl remembered in what way her name and his had been connected, and naturally shrank from anything that might seem to give it confirmation. But as the train passed the avenue to Bergan Hall, the Major wheeled into the vacant place behind the carriage of the chief mourners, assisted them out at the gate of the cemetery, and offered Astra his arm.

"I am your father's nearest living relative," said he, huskily, "and though I behaved like a brute to your mother at one time, I have been sorry enough for it since, to have a right to follow her to the grave."

Many of Mrs. Lyte's old friends and neighbors gathered round to assist in the last solemn rites, and some of them came afterward to say a few words of sympathy and regret to Astra. She was not surprised that Doctor Remy was not of the number, but she did wonder a little that she saw nothing of Carice. She had observed Mrs. Bergan standing near the foot of the grave, looking strangely old and altered; but she seemed to have disappeared as soon as the service was ended.

Having conducted her back to the carriage, and seated her therein, Major Bergan took a folded paper from her pocket, tore it in pieces, and laid the fragments on her lap.

"There it is," said he; "and I wish that my hand had been sawed off before I ever wrote to your mother, to tell her of its existence. The place is yours now, free and unincumbered, to do what you like with. Good bye; and don't bear malice, if you can help it."

He gave her no opportunity to reply, but signalled to the coachman to drive on. Looking back, she saw him standing on the same spot, with uncovered head, watching the carriage until it was out of sight.

She was in nowise disposed to bear malice. She remem-

bered too well how glad she had been, at the time, of an available pretext for leaving Berganton; besides, the Major had certainly made all possible amends for his hasty action.

Moreover, Mrs. Lyte's death-bed had not been without its softening and salutary effect upon her mind, also. Although she had fallen, for a time, into that saddest of all infidelities—a distrust of God's goodness to His children—the last lovely moments of her mother's life, the last grateful, joyous words from her mother's lips, and the still brightness of her mother's dead face, had set her feet—for a little while at least—on those Heights of Contemplation, whence life is seen to be good and valuable, not for what it is, but for what it shapes out; not for the materials that it heaps together, or the tools that it uses, but for the character which it moulds unto perfection, the soul which it slowly chisels into beauty and dignity and strength. So viewed, these last months of adversity became but the fine, finishing touches of the Master's hand, to Mrs. Lyte's already lovely spirit, and Major Bergan but one of the blind, necessary instruments, operating better than he knew or willed.

And come what would, Astra could nevermore forget that broad view of the real work and object of life's events; faith would ever after be easier for those moments of clear sight. She came back from her mother's grave with a bereaved heart, but with a spirit more at rest than it had been for many months; and her face wore the same expression of gentle, sweet resignation, which had been the prevailing characteristic of her mother's for years.

She came back—but not to the dingy little house, nor the desolate rooms, and certainly not to the straitened circumstances. Miss Thane had taken Bergan into her confidence, on the day before, and asked the favor of his superintendence of certain final steps toward the accomplishment of a plan that she had conceived and partly executed. Money and good-will, working together, usually achieve wonders

in comparatively short space of time; as the result of their present coöperation, Astra was set down at Miss Thane's door on her return from Berganton, late at night, and ushered into a suite of rooms, opposite Diva's own, handsomely fitted up for the accommodation of herself and Cathie. One was a studio, to which all her own pictures, statues, and other artistic belongings had been carefully transferred, and skilfully arranged to produce an accustomed and home-like effect. Another was a pleasant little parlor, with her books and her work-basket on the centre-table, to lend it a familiar grace; and in the bedroom beyond, her faithful old Chloe was waiting, with joyful tears in her eyes, to welcome and to attend upon her.

Astra turned to her cousin, and tried to speak; but the too heavily freighted words were slow in coming forth, and Diva anticipated them by taking both her hands in hers, and saying gently;—

“We are sisters, now, Astra: children of twin mothers, and left alone in the world,—I more completely, even, than you; what better thing can we do, at least for the present, than to unite our forces, having one home, and living, loving, and laboring together for the same, or kindred ends? And Cathie shall be our joint charge; that, having two watchful elder sisters, she may never know, even partially, what I know so well, the misery of a motherless childhood. Is it a compact?”

Astra bowed her head in acquiescence, and her eyes shone bright through grateful tears. She was relieved beyond measure, to know that she was not to face the world single-handed. The loneliness that she had so dreaded was not to be encountered, the heavy responsibility of her little sister's care and training was to be, in some degree, shared. In Diva's strength and steadfastness of character, which she felt by intuition, and in its sweetness, which she had found out at her mother's bedside, as very few had done before her, there would be all needful protection,

aid, and comfort; while, in its subtle quality of a wise and delicate reserve, there was ample assurance of respect for her own individuality, freedom for her own way of thought and work. Finally, thanks to Major Bergan's generous action in respect of the mortgage, she need not fear to be a burden on her cousin. Either by sale or lease, the place could be made to yield her a fixed moderate income, and her own labor would do the rest.

She did not suspect the extent of Diva's resources, nor what pleasant plans for her own and Cathie's happiness and advantage she was turning over in her mind. Of these things Diva would breathe no word, until the sisterhood of which she had spoken had become so real and firm a bond as to preclude any sense of obligation.

Meanwhile, the fact of living no more to herself, of having some one else to think of, to care for, to comfort and cheer, was doing wonderfully effective work in clearing and softening Diva's own character,—in uprooting the weeds which had chiefly testified to the richness of the underlying soil heretofore, and giving the plants of grace leave to branch out and blossom and bear fruit. Daily, as Bergan met her, in his visits to Astra's studio, or his walks, he saw that something was gone from the chill pride and weariness of her old expression, something added of sweetness, softness, and benignity, yet without any loss of that still and stately grace, in which had subsisted so potent a charm. Daily, too, he marvelled at her increasingly magnificent beauty; over which, none the less, still lingered some faint shadow from the past, like the soft haze hanging over an autumn landscape, and constituting its last, consummate grace. He could not help wondering whence that shadow came, and how it was to go, since it always gave him an indefinable impression of being connected with his own destiny.

One day he met her in the street alone, but, as he never presumed in the least upon the half confidential relations

into which circumstances had thrown them, he was passing on with a courteous bow, when she stopped him.

"Mr. Arling," she said, flushing slightly, but in very clear, musical tones, "I have much to thank you for, but most of all for the promise which you made me at Farview, some weeks ago; and which, I doubt not, you have conscientiously performed. How much that performance has had to do with the important events that have taken place since, I cannot tell; but it is certain that I discern an order, a sequence, a relation of means to an end, during these last weeks, which I have never before been able to discover in the events of my life,—perhaps because my days have never before been so regularly and earnestly recommended to loving Divine guidance. Be that as it may, the time of which you spoke has come; I have learned to pray for myself—and for others. Thank you again, and good evening."

It was one of her peculiarities, resulting probably from some years of residence abroad, that she seldom gave her hand to a gentleman. Now, however, she offered it to Bergan, for the second time, as he remembered; and again, as before, he had a curious presentiment that within that white hand there lay an invisible, but precious gift for him, waiting its appointed time.

IX.

MISTAKES.

THE summer ran its course, and came to an end. With the first frost of autumn, Hubert Arling arrived in Savalla, to pay a visit of indefinite extent to his brother. A few days after, Coralie, newly returned from Farview, called at the office, expecting to find her father there, according to appointment; but found only Bergan, as it appeared, writing in his usual place. He rose, bowed, and finally took her offered hand, with what seemed to her an odd mixture of hesitation and embarrassment, while she poured forth greetings, thanks, and questions.

"You are looking wonderfully well," she concluded; "one would think you had been rustivating in the mountains, instead of spending a hot and lonely summer in the city. But I suppose that you are lonely no longer; you must be very glad to have your brother with you; my father told me of his arrival."

He looked much amused. "I suspect that *I* am my brother," said he, smiling. "But I am *not* my brother whom you take me for. I wish I were,—to have the honor of your acquaintance."

It was Coralie's turn to look embarrassed. "I thought—is it not Mr. Arling?" she stammered.

"It is Mr. Arling—Hubert Arling, at your service. Can I do anything for you?"

Coralie was so much amazed, that it would have been difficult for her to decide, at the moment, whether he could do anything for her or not. But the entrance of Mr. Youle and Bergan relieved her from the necessity of answering,

and gave her opportunity to compare the brothers at her leisure. Unquestionably, they were singularly alike, in personal appearance, manner, and somewhat, even, in mind. Only, when seen together, Bergan was found to be so much older and graver of aspect—far more than was justified by his two years of seniority—that she wondered how she could ever have mistaken one for the other. And, certainly, there was a rare charm about Bergan's gravity, a singular fascination in looking into his deep, thoughtful, all-observant eyes, and conjecturing what disappointment or sorrow lay darkly underneath. Still, Hubert's buoyancy and animation were wonderfully taking, too, in their way; and her youthfulness sprang involuntarily forward to meet his. On the whole, she was glad to know that Mr. Arling had a brother every way so worthy of him.

Before she left, the brothers received and accepted an invitation from Mr. Youle to dine with him. But for Hubert's sake, Bergan would gladly have declined it. Having once introduced his brother into pleasant society, however, he could leave him to make his own way in it,—as he was fully qualified to do.

When the door closed on the father and daughter, Hubert looked at his brother, and smiled meaningly.

“Why did you not tell me?” he asked.

“What should I tell?” rejoined Bergan, composedly.

“That your future was likely to atone so prettily and pleasantly for your past.”

Bergan looked grave. “Not another word of that, Hubert, if you please. The past is not atoned for, in that sense; in another, I hope it may be. Miss Coralie is, to me, simply my kind old partner's very admirable and estimable daughter.”

Hubert looked half incredulously into his eyes, but there was no resisting the strong confirmation of their quiet, steady, answering gaze.

“But, Bergan, you are a goose!” he broke out.

"At your service," was the reply, with a bow of mock courtesy.

"Pshaw! Then, if I go and trade on your capital, you will never call me to account?"

"Never."

Hubert held out his hand; Bergan gave it a firm, strong clasp. There was not another word; they understood each other.

In the midst of the desultory chat that followed, there came a knock at the door; and in answer to Bergan's prompt "Come in," his former client, Unwick, entered.

"My brother," explained Bergan, as the new comer looked a little hesitatingly at Hubert. "Would you like to see me alone?"

"As you please," replied Unwick. "It is your business rather than mine that brings me here; if anything so vague and indefinite can be called business."

"Then, proceed. I have no secrets from my brother. Will you take a chair?"

Unwick sat down, and cleared his throat.

"It is a long story; but I will make it as brief as I can. You know that my cousin Varley is now in prison, under sentence of death for the murder of which I came so near to being convicted myself,—and should have been, but for you. Well, he sent for me a few days ago, to ask my pardon, and to beg me to take charge of a certain child of his. It seems that, two or three years ago, he was inveigled into a marriage with a beautiful but unprincipled girl, belonging to one of the worst families in this vicinity; her parents keep a low tavern, generally known, I believe, as the 'Rat-Hole,' about a mile out of town, on the Berganton road. Do you know it?"

"Yes, it has been pointed out to me," replied Bergan.

"Well, the girl is dead; but there is a child, left in the grandmother's hands, which Varley wants me to get possession of, and bring up in a respectable way. Poor fellow!

he has seen what is the result of evil associations, and desires to save his child from a similar fate. Still, he wishes the matter to be arranged quietly, if possible. So, yesterday, I went out to see the grandmother—that explains how I came to be in so vile a place. Well, I was made to wait for a half hour in a dirty little back room; and having nothing else in the world to interest me, my attention was attracted by a conversation on the other side of the thin board partition which divided the room from the next one. Still, I doubt if I should have taken the trouble to try to make it out, if I had not heard your name spoken. Then it occurred to me that I might possibly be able to do you a good turn, in part payment of what you had done for me. So, swallowing my scruples as best I could, I put my ear to one of the cracks, and listened. There were two men on the other side, but they were wise enough not to call names,—I did not get the least clue to whom or what they were. One talked quite low, but in a clear, though rather thin voice, which made it comparatively easy to catch what he was saying. The other talked louder, but pretty thick, as if he were a good deal the worse for liquor; and he mixed up everything that he said with such a queer medley of proverbs—”

“Proverbs!” interrupted Bergan, starting, and beginning to look interested.

“Yes,—proverbs in every language under the sun,—Latin, Greek, Spanish, German, and all the rest,—a regular Tower-of-Babel performance. Do you recognize him?”

“I suspect that I do. Go on.”

“Well, his companion,—have I given you any clue to *him*?”

“None as yet. Perhaps I may get one as your story progresses.”

“*He* was persuading this old proverb-spouter to sign some paper,—a will, I think; but it was only after a good deal of arguing, and bribing, and threatening, that he suc-

ceeded in doing so. Now comes your part in the matter; the old fellow's great objection seemed to be that he didn't want to injure you."

"Me!" repeated Bergan, in much astonishment; "what had I to do with it?"

"That is exactly what I couldn't find out; but I thought you might be able to tell. You cannot?"

"Not in the least. What else was there?"

"Nothing, only the old bundle of proverbs also wanted to know 'what would be to pay,' if they were found out, —would it be felony, or compounding of felony, or what?"

"Why!" exclaimed Bergan, "the will was a forgery, then!"

"I cannot say as to that. The man who *didn't* spout proverbs set the other's scruples at rest, first, by asserting that there was not the least danger of detection; and secondly, by declaring that you would not sustain any injury, because the property was certain to come to him, soon or late, anyhow. Whereupon the drunken Solomon muttered, *sotto voce*, 'Into the mouth of a bad dog, often falls a good bone,' and appeared to sign his name as required. At least, I heard the scratching of a pen on paper; and, after that, some money was told out on the table, as a first instalment of the bribe agreed upon; and another instalment was to be paid at the same place to-morrow. Do you get any light on the transaction yet?"

Bergan looked very grave. He remembered old Rue's assertion that Doctor Remy had wedded Carice simply to get possession of the Hall estates, through his uncle's will in her favor. "Was the first voice that of an educated man?" he asked.

"Thoroughly so; an exceedingly distinct, even intonation, and the language was well chosen, too. It would have been a very pleasant voice to the ear, except that it seemed to lack heart, emotion; it was just clear and cold,

like ice. Are you beginning to see your way through the affair?"

"Very dimly, if at all. But I think that I know the parties."

"Is there anything to be done about it? Can I help you in any way?"

Bergan shook his head. He remembered that Doctor Remy was the husband of Carice. He sat silent, his heart swelling with unselfish pain and pity for the pure, delicate nature thus linked to the dark and vile one; he hoped that the latter had not lost the art of concealing somewhat of its hideousness.

Mr. Unwick rose. "I will not detain you any longer. I am glad—or sorry, whichever is proper—that my story proves to be of so little importance."

"Thank you, nevertheless, for taking the trouble to come and tell it to me. By the way, did you get the child you went after?"

"Not yet; the grandmother declared that it was not in the house, though I did not believe her. Bad woman as she is, I think she really loves it, and would like to keep it. But I was authorized to offer her a considerable sum of money to get it quietly out of her hands; and she knows that the law gives the father the right to dispose of its future. I am going, to-morrow afternoon, to get a final answer from her, after she has consulted with her husband, who was out when I was there."

"Will you let me go with you? I should like to see if I recognize any old acquaintance around the place; and if I do, to give him a friendly warning to take care not to be seen there again. I happen to know that the premises are now under constant surveillance, as a suspected depository of stolen goods, and that the police are meditating a descent upon them in a day or two."

"I shall be only too happy to have your company," replied Unwick, courteously.

"And I will go along, too, if you don't object," remarked Hubert. "If the place is of the character you mention, the more the safer, as well as merrier, I should say."

"Then, I will call for you to-morrow, at three o'clock" said Unwick, "if that suits your convenience."

The "Rat-Hole" wore an appearance of exceeding quietness, in the sunny autumn afternoon. A half tipsy vagabond or two lounged about the stoop, but the greater part of its frequenters were of the owl species, careful not to show their heads in the daytime.

Having signified to the bar-keeper that his business was with the mistress of the house, Unwick was shortly summoned to her presence, leaving the brothers waiting in the bar-room. After a considerable time he reappeared, and beckoned to Bergan.

"I have persuaded Mrs. Smilt to allow of a witness to our transaction," said he. And he added, in a low tone, "The pair that I spoke of, are on the other side of the partition again; you can hear their voices, and satisfy yourself whether you know them or not."

Mrs. Smilt was a hard, ill-favored woman, of about fifty; she had a child on her lap, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Mr. Unwick wants a witness to our business," she remarked, grimly, to Bergan. "Well, here's the child, and there's the money that he's to pay me for't. It's a fair bargain, and I don't mean to shirk it; though I'd rather keep the child, a good deal, myself. But my husband 'ud rather have the money; and he's captain."

Bergan bowed. He would not speak lest his voice should be heard and recognized in the adjoining apartment. He drew near the partition, but there was only a sound of footsteps on the other side, and the closing of a door; he was too late to get any satisfaction from this quarter. He

stood waiting impatiently for Unwick to bring his business to an end, and half inclined to excuse himself, and make his escape, when he heard a pistol-shot, and a brief struggle, ended by a heavy fall, in the direction of the bar-room. He opened the door, and ran thither, closely followed by Unwick and Mrs. Smilt.

A singular scene was presented to his eyes. Prostrate on the floor lay Doctor Remy, with an exceedingly black and discomfited face; while Hubert was standing over him like a young gladiator. On one side, stood Dick Causton pouring forth a volley of utterly incoherent proverbs and entreaties, addressed to his "dear young friend Mr. Bergan;" and, on the other, stood the barkeeper, so bewildered, apparently, by this sudden and unaccountable fracas, as to be undecided which side or what tone to take. At sight of Bergan, Dick reeled backward, and looked completely confounded; Doctor Remy set his teeth hard, and his face grew blacker than ever.

Bergan looked at Hubert. "What does this mean?" he asked.

"Upon my soul, I wish I knew!" responded Hubert. "This—*gentleman*"—there was a deeply sarcastic emphasis on the word—"did me the honor to point a pistol at me. I knocked it up, and him down; that is all I know about the matter."

Bergan motioned him to stand aside, and helped Doctor Remy to his feet. "Thank God—if you ever do such a thing"—said he solemnly, "that you have been saved from the commission of another crime. Go, now; and, for your own sake, as well as for the sake of those connected with you, take care to be seen here no more. I assure you that it is a dangerous place for persons without legitimate business and fair credentials."

Doctor Remy had recovered his composure, in part. He drew himself up haughtily. "Keep your advice for those who need it," he rejoined; "I am here simply as a

physician, in attendance upon a sick man. What your business may be, is none of mine: good evening." And he strode out of the door.

Hubert stood looking on, the picture of astonishment. "Was there ever such a riddle!" said he. "First, an unknown man attempts my life; and next, you bid him go in peace, or something very like it!"

"He took you for me," said Bergan, quietly.

"I appreciate the compliment. But are you in the habit of serving for a target?"

"Hush! It was Doctor Remy."

Hubert looked more amazed than ever, for a moment; then his brow flushed, and his eyes lit up. "Lucky for him that you did not tell me that before," said he. "He should never have gotten out of my hands, except into those of a policeman. Why, Bergan, what are you thinking of, to let him escape us thus?"

"I will explain all to you, when we get home," answered Bergan, wearily. "Mrs. Smilt, I beg your pardon for having been the unintentional cause of such a commotion in your house; I think I can assure you that no harm has been done. Mr. Unwick, are you ready to go?"

At the door, Bergan stopped and looked around for Dick Causton; but he had taken advantage of the discussion between the brothers to sneak out. The fact was a suggestive one to Bergan, taken in connection with Unwick's story of the preceding day. Never before, in spite of his bad habits and fallen estate, had Dick Causton been known to flee from before any man's face.

X.

LIKE A THIEF IN THE NIGHT.

BERGAN could not help wasting a little wonder on Doctor Remy's choice of the "Rat-Hole" as a place for transacting business, of whatever character. Yet the explanation was simple. The doctor was there, as he had stated, professionally. One of the *habitués* of the place had been severely wounded in an encounter with a policeman, some weeks before; and although he had succeeded in escaping unrecognized, the affair had made so much stir that his friends had not deemed it prudent to put him into the hands of any of the city physicians, for treatment. Doctor Remy had therefore been summoned from Berganton, and had not only conducted the case with his usual skill, but, foreseeing a possibility of turning the circumstance to future account, had won the ruffian's warmest gratitude by keeping his secret and declining any fee. Having thus gotten the run of the place, and the good will of its inmates, he had chosen it for the scene of his interviews with Dick Causton, because he had his own excellent reasons for not wishing these interviews to be seen or suspected by anybody in Berganton. And Dick made no objections, inasmuch as various small errands, which he dignified with the title of "business," had taken him to Savalla, for two or three consecutive days; and the "Rat-Hole" was a convenient stopping-place, and, moreover, furnished liquor which had the two-fold merit of being of a better quality than any to be had at the "Gregg Tavern," and of being quaffed at Doctor Remy's expense. Dick was not likely to trouble his head

much about the character of any house possessing these strong recommendations.

In regard to the signing of the fraudulent will, he had shown himself a little more scrupulous; his habit of intoxication had not yet accomplished its evil work of obliterating all sense of right, and every consideration of honor. At the first broaching of the subject, he had indignantly refused to listen to it for a moment. Later on—having apparently gotten some new lights on the question in the meantime—he had quietly suffered his objections to give way, one after another, to the doctor's arguments and bribes; to the great satisfaction of the latter, who found his task, on the whole, easier than he had expected.

Yet he might have felt some misgivings, if he had followed Dick out of the house, immediately after the signing of the will, and heard the low, satisfied chuckle with which he tumbled into his superannuated chaise, and started his horse on a jog-trot toward Berganton. The potent draught just swallowed had as yet taken effect only in quickening his sense of the humorous, and putting him on excellent terms with his own self-conceit. His eyes twinkled with amusement, too intense to be denied the occasional vent of a loud burst of laughter, or an appropriate string of proverbs.

“*Wer dem Spiele zusieht, kann's am besten*, my dear Doctor Remy,” he muttered; “or, in other words, the looker-on sees more of the game than the player. What would you give to know what I know, I wonder! Just wait till the right time comes; then you'll find out that ‘He is worst cheated, who cheats himself.’”

A mile further on, his potations beginning to make themselves felt, he suddenly broke out, with a tipsy laugh and leer;—“‘*Man kan ei drage haardt med brudet Reb*,’ mine excellent doctor,—you cannot haul hard with a broken rope! Ha! ha!”

And, although his shamefaced flight from Bergan's

presence, on the second day, may seem to indicate that he was not quite certain of the uprightness of all his acts and motives, no sooner was he fairly on the road to Berganton than he began to chuckle again.

Bergan, meanwhile, was questioning within himself whether he ought not to make known Unwick's story to Major Bergan. He hesitated only because he foresaw that the information might possibly be set down to his self-interest, rather than his desire to serve his uncle. Nevertheless, it did not take him long to decide that he must do what he knew to be the right thing, regardless of consequences. Nor was it certain that his uncle would misconstrue his motives:—not long since, he had received an intimation from Rue that he was sure to meet with a cordial reception whenever he could make it convenient to visit Berganton; the Major's anger having so completely wasted away under the double attrition of time and favorable report,—not to mention her own steady influence in his behalf,—that he had lately expressed a wish to see him. There was really no good reason, therefore, why he should hesitate to present himself at the Hall, except that the whole neighborhood was certain to bristle with unpleasant recollections. However, he must face them some time, and as well now as ever.

Still, as nightfall was at hand, and he knew of no reason for hurry, he thought it expedient to postpone the visit till the morrow. He would ride over to the Hall, he thought, betimes in the morning. Having made his arrangements accordingly, and committed his office to Hubert's care, he retired early, and soon forgot the fatigues and excitements of the day in a profound sleep.

He had not slept long, however, before he woke from a dream—wherein Doctor Remy figured as an iconoclast, overthrowing and demolishing the ancient gods of Bergan Hall—to the consciousness that some one was knocking loudly at his door.

"Who is there?" he called.

"It's me, Massa Harry," responded a voice, with the unmistakable negro intonation; but, nevertheless, a voice too much disconnected with the present to meet with immediate recognition from his but half-awakened faculties.

"Who is 'me'?" he demanded again.

"You's own boy Brick, Massa Harry," was the reply.

With an instant intuition of evil, Bergan sprang out of bed, and opened the door. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"Oh, Massa Harry! ole massa's dyin'," replied Brick; "an' gramma Rue, she sent me for you to come right off; she say,—'Tell him to ride fast, dere's not a minit to lose.' An' I'se brought Vic 'long for you; an' while you's a-dressin', I'll jes' go an' give her a drink, an' rub her down a lilly bit, so she'll be right smart and fresh when you's ready to start."

It was one o'clock in the morning when Bergan saw the great dusky pile of the Hall, and the dark masses of the live oaks, rise before him, in the pale light of the waning moon. He knew that its master lay within. Brick had narrated how Rue had ordered and superintended his removal thither, in one of his moments of comparative quiet and exhaustion;—the old woman being of the opinion that it was not fitting for him to die elsewhere than under the ancestral roof, in the same room where one after another of his forefathers had likewise laid down the burden of the flesh, and begun the new life of the spirit. To this room, Bergan was easily guided by his groans and cries.

Never before had he seen a man in the terrible grasp of delirium tremens; and now, after a brief look, he was glad to turn away his eyes.

Major Bergan was on the bed, but he was only held there by the main strength of two stout negroes. A fright-

ful spasm contorted his face and twisted his limbs. Great drops of perspiration stood on his brow; and from his mouth flowed a mingled stream of oaths, curses, shrieks of horror, threats of defiance, and groans of agony. His bodily anguish was only less than his mental torture. His eyes started from his head at the phantom-creations of his delirious imagination. The furniture was alive, watching him with fiery eyes, and threatening him with envenomed teeth and claws; the shadows took mocking shapes and gibed and jeered at him; and the pictures were demons setting them all on. The very hairs of his head turned to slimy snakes, and the bed-clothes were now damp winding-sheets, and now devouring flames.

“Have you had a doctor?” asked Bergan of Rue, who had met him at the door.

“Yes; Doctor Remy has been here twice; he left not much more than half an hour ago. He said he had a critical case on hand, that must be seen to; and there was nothing to be done here, except what we could do as well as he.”

“What are you doing?”

“Giving him soup to keep up his strength, and opium to quiet him. A few minutes ago, too, in a lucid moment, he called for some powders that he has been in the habit of taking, which, he said, always did him more good than anything else. There were only two left; we gave him one, as he was so bent on having it; I thought if it did no good, it couldn't do any harm.”

“Did Doctor Remy say that he would call again?”

“He did, but, Master Bergan, a blind woman's ears are quick at catching meanings as well as words, and he did not mean to come very soon,—not, I reckon, till all is over.

Bergan meditated. Though he had long known that his uncle's habits would be likely to bring him, sooner or later, to a drunkard's most miserable end, he could not but think it somewhat suspicious that the seizure should have

followed so closely upon the completion of the fraudulent will.

"When was my uncle taken?" he asked.

"Early this evening. He had been drinking a good deal for two or three days past; he said he did not feel well, and he *would* keep at the brandy bottle, in spite of all that I could say to him. About ten o'clock this morning, Doctor Remy came in to see him, and I suspect, told him something that made him angry,—for I heard him swearing furiously to himself, after the doctor had gone. And then, probably, he fell to drinking worse than ever; but it was not until about four o'clock that I heard him groaning and crying out, and he has kept it up a good part of the time ever since. But now, I think, he seems to be getting a little easier."

Bergan turned to the bed. The spasm was over, and the Major lay exhausted, with his eyes closed. Opening them, they immediately brightened with a look of recognition.

"Is that you, Harry?" he asked, feebly.

"Yes, uncle," replied Bergan, taking his hand; "Rue sent for me, and I came at once. I am sorry to see you so ill."

"I think you are, my boy, I think you are," responded Major Bergan; "you look like it, and besides, a Bergan never lies. And I'm sorry, too,—all the more, because I suspect that it's my own fault. If ever you learn to drink—and I don't feel quite so sure that it's necessary as I did once—don't drink too hard, Harry, don't drink too hard! If ever I get over this bout, I swear I'll think twice, hereafter, before I drink once. And if I don't, I'm glad you're here, Harry, boy; it's well for the new master to be on before the old one is off."

"I hope that you will live to carry your good resolutions into effect," said Bergan earnestly.

"Do you? Well, so do I."

He lay quiet for a moment, busy with his own thoughts. All at once he started up, exclaiming;—

“Fire and fury! what’s that?”

The negroes caught hold of him, expecting a fresh convulsion of the same nature as the preceding ones; but, though his face was frightfully distorted, and his form writhed with pain, there was no accompaniment of phantasmal horrors.

“Brandy!” he finally gasped, through his set teeth.

Rue motioned to one of the women in waiting to bring some. Bergan put his hand on her arm. “Surely you will not give it to him *now*,” said he, impressively.

“The doctor said he must have a little, now and then,” she answered.

But before the glass could be put to his lips, he groaned, shuddered from head to foot, and fell back on the pillow, with his eyes rolled up in his head, his hands clenched, and a dark froth issuing from between his shut teeth. He was dead.

XI.

AFTER MANY DAYS.

THERE was a sudden silence—the shadow of God's hand. In it the lately agonized, writhing body lay at peace, the anxious spectators stood awed and motionless. Yet this silence was more voiceful than any sound,—full of solemn questionings and more solemn answers, subtle suggestions, grave warnings, and momentous intimations. Of the value and the valuelessness of life, of the night and the morning of death, of the character and the import of the Hereafter,—on all these topics it discoursed more eloquently than the most silvery of oratorical tongues.

It had also its more commonplace and definite purport to the simple-minded dependents gathered in the gloom of the broad gallery and the black oaken staircase; which was no sooner fully apprehended, than the sound of weeping was heard among them,—though not noisily demonstrative, according to the African wont, for their awe of their late master had been greater than their affection, and was in nowise diminished by the knowledge of the dread change that had come upon him. It was genuine sorrow, nevertheless, for, though he had been a hard master, of late, most of them remembered when he had been kinder; and, at the worst, he had not been without gleams of good humor and leniency, upon which their minds now dwelt willingly and tenderly. Some few gray heads, too, there were among them, who recollected the grace and promise of his youth, and how proud they had been of their gay, handsome, generous, high-spirited master; and these, striv-

ing to forget that the promise had not been kept, or to set down its failure to adverse fate rather than wilful shortcoming, crowded the doorway, or stole in pairs to the foot of the bed, and looked through tears at the dead face, and whispered to each other that something of its youth had come back to it;—the soul, as it took its departure, had stamped the features with their original nobility and grace. And then they stole out, to prompt each other's memories with anecdotes of that vanished youth, and to dilate the eyes of their juniors with descriptions of the ancient splendors and hospitalities of the desolate old Hall;—the banquets that had been served in the dusky dining-room, the gay measures that had been trodden in the long parlor, the wedding-trains and the funeral processions that had passed through the great door; and, finally, of the ghosts that still walk the empty rooms, and may be expected to be seen stalking through the long passages to-night, or holding solemn conclave around the deserted tabernacle of the latest comer among them.

Hark! is not that the sound of footsteps, falling airily, yet heavily, too, in some distant chamber? And there, in the upper gallery, is certainly the rustle of the supernaturally stiff silk robe of the first Lady Bergan, who was found dead in her bed, so many years ago! And now creaks the door at the end of the wing, through which old Sir Harry is wont to march majestically forth, sword in hand, to take vengeance on any degenerate scion of the house that he encounters in his path! This last apparition is too much for their nerves. They shrink together, and flee noiselessly to their cabins, hearing the footsteps of the angry knight following them all the way, and leaving the old house untenanted save by the ghosts, and the few faithful watchers in the death-chamber.

Rue is kneeling by the corpse. She has closed the eyes—sightless as her own;—she has smoothed back the disordered hair; she has pressed the lips together over the set

teeth; now she is passing her withered hand gently over the rigid features, thinking more of the baby that she nursed, the child that she petted and spoiled, and the youth that she admired and loved, than of the middle-aged man that she had served with her best strength, or the elderly one that she had stood by so faithfully, striving in vain to hold him back from his evil ways. Finally, she touches the cold lips with her own.

"I kissed him when he was born," she murmurs, half apologetically, to Bergan, "and there will be no kiss on his dead lips, unless I leave it there."

Bergan looks at her wonderingly. Her face is calm. there are no tears in her eyes; she has the satisfied and relieved expression of one who, after long and patient waiting, beholds the expected rest or gladness close at hand, and is already half content.

"One little trust more to be fulfilled," she says softly to herself, "and then my work is done, my long service of the family is over. My God, have I served Thee as well?"

And although, in her deep humility, she shakes her head, and pronounces herself an unprofitable servant, we, who can hear better that voice in the silence, making little of rank, wealth, talent, and culture, and much of faith, patience, and integrity, may be sure that it utters benignantly,—
"Well done!"

Rising, at last, Rue turned to Bergan, and made him a low, reverential courtesy.

"Master Bergan," she asked, "have you any orders to give?"

Bergan started. There was a quiet significance in her tone and manner that made his heart beat fast, for just one moment,—not with elation, however, so much as with a heavy weight of responsibility; as if the chill corpse, the crumbling Hall, the hundreds of negroes, the far-stretching lands, and all the cares and complexities thereto pertaining, had been suddenly flung on his shoulders. But the feeling

passed quickly; he remembered the will in favor of Carice, as well as its fraudulent successor (which, he now bethought himself, it might be impossible to nullify, even if he could bring himself to come in conflict with Carice's husband); and the weight slid easily from his shoulders, though not without leaving some correlative heaviness in his heart.

Still there were orders to be given; and, until a more legitimate authority or a closer relationship should supersede him, he, being on the spot, must answer the immediate need of headship. He despatched messengers, therefore, in various directions,—one to Godfrey Bergan to apprise him that the long, bitter feud was ended, and between him and the corpse of his brother there might be peace; another to Doctor Remy, with a supplementary direction that if he was not to be found, Doctor Gerrish should be summoned also; and a third to the undertaker, to arrange for the sombre funeral paraphernalia. When all was done, he was glad to retire for awhile to his room, leaving Rue, as she desired, alone with her dead. Yes, hers,—no living person had so strong a prescriptive right to that sad and tender vigil; no other love held the sufficient warrant of such long and loyal service.

Bergan remembered, long afterward, just how she looked as he bade her good night; standing, tall, gaunt, and erect, by the high, old-fashioned bedstead, drawing the heavy curtains round the silent dead with one hand, and extending the other toward him with a free and lofty gesture that suggested the unveiling of a new and golden future.

“Good night, Master Bergan,” said she, “or rather, good morning. For you, the night is past, and the dawn is near. For you the Bergan star shines bright in the morning sky; for you and the old Hall a new reign of peace and prosperity is begun. Neglect not the warnings of the past; rejoice in the promise of the future. And God bless you, now and evermore!”

The last words were spoken with a solemnity befitting a long farewell. At the moment, a vague apprehension flitted across Bergan's mind; but, looking back, he saw that she had seated herself quietly by the bed, like one whose only purpose was to watch and wait. Besides, she had spoken freely of the morrow's necessities and duties, and of her own part in them; it was plain that she had no apprehension for herself, and he might dismiss his fears.

In the hall, he was met by the solemn ticking of the tall old clock, which some one had set in motion; probably with a vague idea that a human soul's last minutes of time should be carefully measured, and the moment of its entrance upon eternity definitely marked. He could not help shivering at the sound. His mind involuntarily followed the departed soul in its journeyings beyond the bounds of time, picturing the heights or depths it had already reached, the scenes opened to its awed vision, the momentous truths dawning upon its startled comprehension. These thoughts not only accompanied him to his room, but would not be shut out by the closing door.

Weary as he was, he had no disposition to sleep. He sat down by the table, leaned his head on his hand, and gave himself up to sombre reflections. The gloomy death-bed that he had just witnessed, the emptiness and decay of the old ancestral home, the tangled questions of right and expediency that might present themselves for decision at any moment,—all these weighed heavily on his mind, and depressed his spirits. For one moment he half forgot his rooted trust in an overruling Providence, at once wise and tender, in the contemplation of the chill chain of events that appeared to be tightening around him, the seemingly mysterious fate that had twice compelled his return to this dreary old dwelling,—tomb rather,—to experience some new phase of sin or sorrow, after he had turned his back upon it, as he believed, for many years, if not forever. No wonder the negroes thought it haunted; its heavy, musty

atmosphere was much better adapted for ghosts to float about in than to be breathed into living lungs; it might well be crowded with the spirits of his whole ancestry, to make it so stifling!

He went to the window, to see if it were any better there. Scarcely. The moon had vanished behind a cloud; the night was dim; the outside air seemed not less burdened with woe and mystery than that within; he even fancied that he heard light footsteps on the path below. He flung himself again into his chair, and an almost superstitious awe stole over him, a feeling that there was no such thing as emptiness, but only invisibility,—that the air was teeming with mystic shapes, busily tying circumstance to circumstance, cause to effect, motive to result, and life to life, with cords of terrible strength and indestructibility.

Cords:—The word struck lightly on the sensitive chain of association, and there was an instant response from the past;—"Holden with the cords of his sins." No doubt that was the essential truth. Strictly speaking, a separate act or an individual life was an impossibility; each was bound to each by influence or consequence; sin, especially, entailed its results upon a wide circle of inheritors,—the sinner himself, his kindred, friends, neighbors, even his descendants unto remote generations. Doubtless the sins of many old-time Bergans had helped to twist the cords which had held the mansion of their pride to so sad a period of desertion and decay, if not their scion to so woful a death. With how many such cords was he himself holden, and to what, and for how long?

He lifted his eyes with a start. A dim shadow had fallen on the floor; something was intercepting the gray dawn-rays, which feebly lit the room. He looked at the open window; it framed a slight graceful figure, a wan, but lovely face,—both so well remembered, so fondly loved, so mournfully lost! Of course, it was an apparition, a creation of his own excited fancy, called forth to furnish

another illustration of the strange ramifications and knottings of those mystical cords, and soon to disappear, and make way for some other sharer of his bonds.

And disappear it did; but with a sudden crash, and a startled cry of "Bergan!"—neither of which had any touch of the supernatural. The unexpected sounds at once dissipated his awe; he ran to the window, saw that the rotten flooring of the upper piazza had broken down under some recent weight, leaped the gap, flew down the steps, and found lying underneath a motionless form and a lily-pale face, both half hidden in long, flowing tresses. No apparition this, but a living, breathing Carice,—or what had lately been such;—she looked deathlike enough now.

It may well be questioned whether love ever dies. It disappears from sight, no doubt; it ceases to be felt as motive or end; the very heart from whence it sprang believes that it is no more; perhaps a new—and true—affection occupies its place and does its work. But is this apparent death anything more than a partial decay, analogous to that by which thousands of perennial plants seem annually to perish from the face of the earth, under the frosts of autumn, but the roots of which, nevertheless, carefully preserve their life-principle within, ready to respond with swift springing verdure to the tender kisses and tears of the springtime sun and rain? Is not all death only a sleep?

Bergan had striven conscientiously to destroy his love for Carice, as a thing which, however innocent in its birth, had grown to be a sin. And he had measurably succeeded. His worst heartache was over. Life had ceased to look unattractive; if it did not promise happiness, it offered plenty of work, and a sober well-being. He was beginning to feel the beneficent operation of the law of change, to find that sorrow was not meant to be the life-tenant of any human heart. If he had met Carice under other circumstances, less calculated to throw him off his guard, he

would doubtless have approved himself master of the situation; meeting her with calm cousinly courtesy and kindness, and stifling only a momentary pang in his deep heart. But seeing her thus,—pale, motionless, unconscious,—dying, perhaps, if not already dead,—flung back at his feet, for sympathy and succor, by some mysterious turn of the same tide of circumstance which had borne her away,—a lost jewel, restored after many days,—it is scarcely to be wondered at that, for one moment, as he knelt by the inanimate form, he forgot all the sorrowful past in the anxiety of the present, and touched the mute lips with the warm kiss of a love which, though long repressed and slumbering, seemed now to have neither wasted nor died.

He soon recollected himself, however; when, seeing that Carice still breathed, and was probably only stunned by her fall, he at once addressed himself to the consideration of the serious question what was to be done with her. She had fled suddenly, it would seem, led by some wild, uncontrollable impulse; nothing shielded her from chill or from observation but a nightdress and a light shawl; on one foot was a thin slipper, the other was bare and bleeding; and her dishevelled hair fell round her shoulders, some locks of which, he now noticed, were encrimsoned by blood flowing from a deep cut in her head.

He glanced quickly round; the dawn was yet gray, there was no one astir at the Hall, and probably not at Oakstead; unless she had been missed, there was still time to save her from what, he knew, she would feel to be worse than death, when fully restored to consciousness. He lifted her in his arms—it went to his heart, even at that moment, to feel how thin and light she was—and bore her swiftly to the door of her home. There Mr. Bergan and Rosa met him; they had just discovered her absence, but had not given the alarm; they were still too bewildered to know precisely what steps should be taken for her recovery.

Bergan carried her to the library, and laid her on the sofa. As he did so, she opened her eyes, turned from him to Mr. Bergan, and cried out, in a voice of mingled entreaty and determination;—

“Father, I *cannot* be Doctor Remy’s wife!”

Bergan looked at his uncle with a mixture of surprise and apprehension. “She is delirious,” said he.

“No, thank God!” answered Mr. Bergan, with a look of ineffable relief and gladness; “she is herself again—clothed and in her right mind.”

PART FIFTH.

A BETTER HARVEST.



I.

A CLOUD FOR A COVERING.

THE twelvemonth gone by had not passed lightly over Godfrey Bergan. He was not the same man who had refused so peremptorily to listen to Bergan, on that memorable eve of Carice's wedding. Not only had he grown grayer and thinner, slower of gait and heavier of step; not only were his shoulders bent and his head drooping; but his face wore an expression of settled gravity, bordering on melancholy, and his manner was gentle, almost to submissiveness. Since the night when he had staggered into the cabin of the trusty Bruno, bending under the weight of his dripping burden, he had never, in one sense, laid it down. The thought that he had forced his daughter into a marriage so abhorrent to her that she had been fain to escape from it through the awful door of suicide, had never ceased to haunt his mind, and burden his heart and his conscience.

It had not occurred to him that the fall from the bridge was accidental, inasmuch as Rosa had deemed it her duty to keep inviolate the secret of her young mistress's errand abroad on that night; he was therefore unable to conjecture why Carice should have sought the river-side at so inopportune an hour, except with a purpose of self-destruction.

tion. Nor did it give him any comfort to reflect that her mind must have been set all ajar, before she would have resorted to so desperate an expedient; that only lifted the terrible responsibility from her shoulders to lay it more crushingly on his own. It was he, who, without giving her time to recover from the shock of Bergan's apparent infidelity, or the fatigue and anxiety occasioned by his own illness, had urged her into a union with a man for whom she persistently asserted that she neither had, nor would ever be likely to have, any warmer feeling than respect for his intellectual attainments, and admiration for his professional skill and devotion. To be sure, he had done it solely with a view to her happiness,—doing evil that good might come, and finding too late that “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap.”

First, on that woful night, he had carried Carice to Bruno's cabin, partly because it was nearer to the scene of the disaster, and partly because he feared to encounter some lingering guest or indiscreet servant, if he took her to the cottage. Fortunately, Bruno and his wife were both within; and the latter immediately applied herself to the work of restoration according to her lights; while the former was dispatched, with suitable injunctions to be secret and expeditious, to bring more efficient aid in the person of Doctor Remy.

It soon appeared that—thanks to her father's promptness—Carice had sustained little injury from her immersion in the water; but, though heart and lungs were quickly brought to resume their functions, her senses remained fast locked in stupor. Knitting his brows, for a brief space, over this unexpected complication, Doctor Remy betook himself to a careful examination of the patient's head; and shortly announced that he had discovered a severe contusion of the skull, implying more or less serious injury to the brain.

The stupor would last hours—possibly days. Mean-

while, many appliances and comforts which the cabin could not afford, would be demanded; he therefore advised her immediate removal to the cottage. Mr. Bergan hastened to break the distressing news to her mother, and to make sure that the house and grounds were clear; then Carice was carefully placed on a litter, and borne to her own room.

It was long before she showed any sign of consciousness, longer still before she was free from the supervening fever and delirium, and capable of coherent thought and expression. When that time came, it was found that her memory of the past five months was a blank. Bergan's unaccountable silence, her father's trying illness, Doctor Remy's unacceptable suit, and the ill-starred marriage ceremony—everything which had distressed her mind or wounded her heart, had been completely wiped out of her recollection as by some friendly, pitying hand; and she was carried back, all unconscious of the transit, to the tender joy and blissful content with which she had parted from Bergan. To her thought it was only a few days since he went; yet, with a pleasant inconsequence, she was already beginning to watch for his return. At first, she had seemed a little bewildered by the change of season; it was amidst the flower and foliage of early summer that Bergan had said good-bye; now, the deciduous trees stood bare against the sky, and the flower-beds were shorn of their glory. But her mind was too feeble to reason, and she soon accepted the fact, as she did many another, without trying to account for it. Enough to know that, winter being near, Bergan must be near also.

It may be noted as a curiously ironical turn of that blind Chance, or Fate, in which Doctor Remy believed, that he was compelled, in his professional capacity, to give orders that Carice should be carefully humored, for the present, in this or any other delusion. There was something at stake of far more importance, to him, than his personal feelings as a man or a bridegroom—namely, the own-

ership of Bergen Hall. In consideration of that, Carice must be spared everything tending to excite or distress her, and indulged in whatever was soothing to her mind, or pleasing to her fancy.

Meanwhile, he addressed himself, with renewed ardor and determination, to the study of brain diseases. His attention had already been engaged by the recently promulgated theory of Gall, that each faculty of the mind had its distinct location in the brain; and he was quick to see the fine field thereby opened to pathological investigation. It was in this direction that he hoped, some day, to make his name famous; and it was chiefly as a means to this end that Bergen Hall was valuable in his eyes. He wanted wealth in order to be able to devote himself exclusively to the study of this branch of medical science, and to pursue it, unhampered by considerations of expense, throughout the books and manuscripts, the practitioners and patients, the hospitals and asylums, the morgues and the dissecting-rooms, of the whole world. Till he could do that, he must content himself with the one patient whom circumstance had thrown into his hands.

But here, he was unexpectedly disappointed, in a measure. Whether it were that enough of her recollection revived to associate him dimly with anxiety and distress; or whether, her reason being in abeyance, she was more controlled by her pure and delicate instincts; certain it is, that Carice's fever no sooner left her, than she developed the most unconquerable aversion to him, amounting in time to a degree of terror. At his approach, she either hid her face, and trembled like an aspen leaf, or she fled with cries of fright. And these moments of excitement were followed by such alarming prostration, that Doctor Remy was reluctantly compelled to admit the necessity of keeping out of her sight. His investigations had thenceforth to be conducted through the agency of her parents or of Rosa. Now and then, when she slept,—and her

sleep was always singularly profound, the very twin brother of death,—he stole into her room, to acquaint himself with some particular of the location, depth, or progress in healing, of the injury to her head, and to satisfy himself of the state of her general health.

To every one but Doctor Remy, Carice was gentleness itself. She was happiness, too, in a touchingly quiet, dreamy, illogical form. She was content to spend hours at the window, watching for the first glimpse of Bergan, with a smile on her lips, and her eyes bright with eager expectation; and though she sometimes sighed, when the day ended, and he did not come, she was ready to begin the same hopeful watch on the morrow, and never seemed to know how long it had lasted. As she grew stronger, she resumed, in some measure, her old pursuits;—she busied herself with light household tasks; she wrought dainty embroidery with silks and worsteds; she read, chiefly poetry, the music of which seemed to please her ear, without fatiguing her mind; she even noticed the cloud on her father's brow, and made gentle war upon it,—conquering, of course, as long as he was in her sight, and never suspecting how heavily it settled back afterward. But all this time, the veil over the past never lifted, nor was the eager watch for Bergan ever abandoned.

The few intimate friends, or the servants not of the household, who saw her occasionally, noticed nothing unusual about her, except the delicacy and languor consequent upon a severe illness; Mrs. Bergan being always present to turn the conversation away from every dangerous point, and guide it through safe channels. To the rest of the world, it was simply known that Carice had suddenly been stricken down, on her wedding night, by a fever, supposed to be of the same nature as the one which had lately prostrated her father; and that she was not yet sufficiently strong to show herself abroad, or see much company at home. Doctor Remy, meanwhile, came and

went, and spent as much time at the cottage as could reasonably be expected of a physician with a large area of practice, and an office three miles away from his nominal home. Not a person, outside of the limited household, supposed that he never saw Carice, except when she was fast asleep, and totally unconscious of his presence.

So the months rolled away, and the year drew near to its close. Doctor Remy had prosecuted his abstruse study, by the dim light of the science of that day, with characteristic energy and acuteness. He had slowly felt his way, from the premise that each faculty of the mind had its appropriate seat in the brain, to the conclusion that every local injury or disease would affect mainly the faculty corresponding to the injured or diseased portion, thereby not only indicating the seat of the impaired faculty, but suggesting the possibility of a local remedy for the local disturbance,—probably a delicate and difficult surgical operation, to remove pus, slivers of bone, or other foreign matter pressing upon, piercing, or otherwise irritating the sensitive cellular tissue of the brain. Now, he only longed for an opportunity to test his conclusions by experiment, and would certainly have attempted to use Carice for this purpose, except that on her slender thread of life hung his only chance of Bergan Hall. It would not do to sacrifice the immense future advantage to the small immediate gain.

Nature, meanwhile, was laboring in her slow, gentle way, to effect the same end contemplated by the doctor's science. With the beginning of November, a change was observable in Carice. Her sweet face lost its look of happy anticipation, and grew weary and anxious. There were tokens that she was beginning to reason again, in a fitful, fragmentary way, and to notice some of the many discrepancies between the facts and the theories of her life; sometimes she put her hand to her head with a piteous expression of doubt and bewilderment. By and by, she

became possessed of a spirit of restlessness by day, and of sleeplessness by night; making the care of her—hitherto an easy and a pleasant task—a sufficiently onerous charge. Thus it happened that she had made her escape to the Hall, as heretofore narrated. Her night had been restless, beyond all previous precedent, keeping Rosa constantly on the watch. Toward dawn, she had fallen into a light slumber, during which the weary attendant, sitting quietly by the bedside, had suddenly been overcome by a profound sleep. Waking ere long, and not wishing to disturb her tired maid, Carice stole softly to the window, to look out, as usual, for Bergan's coming, and saw the light shining again from the window of his room in the old Hall. The broken links in the chain of association were stirred, if not reunited,—perhaps a dim reminiscence of her former attempt to reach him woke within her,—she wrapped herself in the first shawl that came to hand, thrust her feet into a pair of slippers, and noiselessly made her way out of the house and down to the river, exactly as she had done a year before. At the gap in the foot-bridge, through which she had fallen, she stopped and put her hand to her brow, in a momentary perplexity. Here, her memory of the former expedition, which had led her thus far on her way, failed her;—what was she to do next?

Lifting her eyes, she again caught sight of the light from the Hall, which had recently been hidden by the trees. Her lips parted in a smile; her hesitation was at an end. Clinging to the hand-rail of the bridge, and sliding her feet carefully along the great beam underneath, she safely passed the gap,—though she lost a slipper in the transit,—and then hurried to the Hall, to meet with the accident lately described.

All of the foregoing history—or at least as much of it as was known to him—Mr. Bergan recounted to his nephew, in a long conversation held in the parlor, after Carice had been soothed by her father's promise that she should be com-

pelled to do nothing but what was right and agreeable in her own eyes, and left to the care of her mother and Rosa. Now, too, the loss of Bergan's letters to his uncle and Carice was discovered; the false or distorted statements in those of Doctor Remy to himself were brought to light and discussed; finally, Mr. Bergan was glad to listen to a succinct recital of Doctor Trubie's reasons for believing Felix Remy to be identical with Edmund Roath.

In the course of the conversation, all reserve between the uncle and nephew insensibly melted away, and the last topic was discussed upon terms of the most cordial confidence and sympathy. Bergan's high reputation in Savalla had not failed to reach his uncle's ears, and sometimes to make him doubt if all his old prejudice was well founded; and now, there was so much dignity and gentleness in his bearing, his words were so full of unselfish consideration for others, he showed himself so ready still, as heretofore, to sacrifice every merely personal feeling to Carice's welfare, that Mr. Bergan's heart, softened and humbled as it had been by adversity, was irresistibly won. He was glad to feel that he had so dispassionate a judgment, so wise a counsellor, and so kind a friend, to lean upon, in this moment of perplexity.

The talk was broken in upon by a message from Mrs. Bergan. Carice, after her manifold questions in regard to the circumstances in which she found herself had been answered or evaded, had sunk into a deep, but apparently natural sleep. Still, her mother could not but be extremely anxious about her; and she suggested that Doctor Remy, or some one else, should be immediately sent for, to provide against the contingency of her waking.

Mr. Bergan looked anxiously at his nephew. "After what you have told me," said he, "I do not feel that I can allow that man to enter Carice's room again, even when she is sleeping. Yet, be he what or whom he may, his professional skill is undeniable, and her life or rea-

son may turn on those waking moments. What is to be done ? ”

“Do you know where he is to be found ? ” asked Bergan.

“No. He merely told me that he had a critical case on hand, which would keep him out all night, and perhaps we should not see him before noon to-day. I suppose he can be heard of at his office.”

Bergan reflected for a moment. “By this time,” said he, “Doctor Gerrish must be on his way to the Hall. From what I have known and heard of him, I believe him to be both a promising physician and an honorable man. Send Bruno to intercept him, on the plea that the dead can wait for his services better than the living. Then tell him, in strict confidence, enough of Carice’s condition to make him understand the case ; but you need say nothing of Doctor Remy, except that he is not at hand, and you feared to wait. Finally, ask, as a special favor, that he will not mention his visit to Doctor Remy, lest the latter be annoyed. He will think you weak and overscrupulous, but he will promise.”

This advice was acted upon. Doctor Gerrish, after listening to Mr. Bergan’s statement and examining Carice as she lay asleep, decided that the recent wound, which was in the neighborhood of the former one, had, in some mysterious way, relieved the inflammation, or counteracted the injury, caused by that—in short, had done precisely what Doctor Remy proposed to do by means of an operation. He furthermore believed that Nature was making her final effort at restoration through the deep sleep which held Carice in bonds so gentle and so firm ; and he gave strict orders that nothing should be suffered to break it. It would doubtless last some hours, perhaps the whole day ; or if she woke, it would be merely to swallow a little nourishment, which should be given her, and then to fall asleep again.

Bergan had waited to hear this decision, and he now requested Doctor Gerrish to ride on to the Hall, where he would join him almost immediately, by the shorter way of the foot-bridge. His uncle detained him longer than he expected, however, for a final consultation about several important matters; and he was conscious that Doctor Gerrish must have been kept waiting for a considerable time, when he finally quitted the house. Hurrying to the foot-bridge, he saw two rough-looking men crossing it from the direction of the Hall. At sight of him, they interchanged a few words, and then came to meet him.

"Mr. Arling, I believe," said one, touching his hat. "We have been asking at the Hall for you, and a doctor that we saw there told us that you were coming this way, and asked us to say, if we met you, that he begged you would hurry."

"Thank you," said Bergan. "That is what I am doing."

"Not so fast," interrupted the other, who was a tall, muscular fellow with a sinister countenance. "You are that Lawyer Arling, I reckon, who got my brother sentenced to state prison last month for burglary."

"I did my duty as prosecuting attorney for the State, if that is what you mean," replied Bergan, coolly.

"You ~~did~~, did you? Well, I'm going to do mine, which is to knock you down for it."

With these words, the man raised his powerful fist. Bergan instinctively threw himself into the attitude of defence; but the ruffian's companion, who had edged behind him, caught hold of both his arms; and the unparried blow felled him senseless to the ground.

II.

SWIFT FEET.

HOWEVER cold a man's temperament may be by nature, however complete the subjection of his passions to his reason and his will, he is nearly certain, in the sudden excitement and confusion of detected guilt, to be betrayed into some act instantly condemned by his better judgment. Such had been the case with Doctor Remy, in his encounter with Hubert Arling at the "Rat-Hole." Mistaking Hubert for Bergan, and believing him to be there only to spy out his actions and thwart his designs, it had been his first impulse to draw the pistol, which he habitually carried, according to the custom of the times and locality, and free himself at once and forever from interference that he conceived to be so dangerous. His chagrin at finding that he had mistaken one brother for the other, was only equalled by his surprise at his calm dismissal and friendly warning, at Bergan's hands. It did not take him long to fix upon the hidden motive of this conduct,—to decide, with a bitter smile, that he had been spared for the sake of Carice.

Yet he had no idea of the extent of Bergan's forbearance toward him on this head. It must be remembered that he never received the slightest intimation of Doctor Trubie's suspicions, or of Bergan's visit to Oakstead, on the night of the wedding. Godfrey Bergan had omitted any mention of either; first, because he had been prevented from doing so by the overwhelming distress and anxiety that had come upon him so suddenly; and afterward, because it had seemed wiser, on the whole, to say nothing.

Doctor Remy, therefore, had no suspicion of the mine over which he had been standing, on that night, nor how its explosion had been averted. From his point of view, Bergan's sudden removal to Savalla, in consideration of the prospect there opened to him, was the most natural thing in the world. Nor did he know any reason why himself and his former friend should not meet on the old terms, upon occasion, except that the gain of the one had been the loss of the other, in respect to Carice. Even here, however, he held himself to be ostensibly blameless, inasmuch as womankind was proverbially fickle, and Bergan had no reason to suppose that he was aware of any relation between him and Carice other than the outward one. He deeply regretted, therefore, that in a moment of surprise and confusion, he should have put himself in a false position. It would have been far better to have met Bergan with the careless ease of a conscience void of offence. But, since he had not done so, it was well that Carice was his sufficient safeguard against retaliation.

Yet one word had fallen from Bergan's lips, which had startled him at the moment, and haunted him on his way homeward. The young man had seriously bidden him be thankful that he was saved from "*another* crime." Was the phrase accidental, or did it imply some knowledge of the affair of the will? In the latter case, was it likely that Bergan would submit to the loss of what he had been encouraged, at one time, to consider his lawful inheritance, without a most rigid scrutiny and investigation of the document by which, while the property was apparently given to Carice, it was done in such a way as to place it absolutely in her husband's control. Would Bergan's forbearance toward her and hers be likely to extend as far as this? Judging by himself, and his experience of men in general, and especially of heirs, he did not hesitate to affirm that it would not. For, though Bergan had seemed to be possessed of some unusually Quixotic notions of honor, independence, and disinterested-

ness, during the period of their intimate association, he had doubtless seen enough of life since then, to grow more sensible. What, then, had he not to dread from his natural acuteness and legal skill, when both of these, sharpened by interest, should be brought to bear on the false will?

Absorbed in these reflections, he had allowed his horse to choose his own pace, which had gradually slackened from a gallop to a trot, and then into a walk, until, at last, he was easily overtaken by Dick Causton, in whose eyes there still shone a humorous twinkle.

"Those Arlings seem to be pretty much of a piece," said he; "they both give better than they take, when it comes to blows. However, the Italians say, *Tutto s'accommoda, eccetto l'osso del collo*,—that means, Everything can be mended except the neck-bone. Yours has come safe out of this fray, but there's no telling how long 'twill stay so, if you're so ready with your pistol."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed Doctor Remy, angrily. "I am in no mood for jesting. Do you suppose that Arling got any clue to our business in that den?"

"How should he?—'A man doesn't look behind the door unless he has been there himself.' Besides, Mr. Arling minds his own business,—which I wish I did!—then I shouldn't have run from him like a dog caught stealing. By the way, Doctor, if the Major makes another will, which cuts the throat of this one of ours, I suppose the forgery goes for nothing?"

Doctor Remy looked at him darkly. "What do you mean?" he asked. "Is he thinking of making another?"

"Not that I know of," replied Dick. "But, 'At the game's end, see who wins.' There is time for him to make a dozen before he dies."

"We will see about that!" muttered the doctor.

"And if he does," persisted Dick, "our will goes for naught, of course,—won't even be looked at, I suppose.

They'll 'trust to the label of the bag,' seeing there's no necessity for opening it!"

Doctor Remy stopped short, and eyed his companion suspiciously. "See here, Dick," said he, in a low, determined tone, "you had better not venture to try any double dealing with me. I will have you to know that I can put you in prison, any day; and I will do it, too, even though I have to go along with you, if you falter one step in the course I have marked out for you. Having begun with me in this business, you will find it for your interest, in more senses than one, to help me through with it."

"That is to say," muttered Dick, ruefully, "*Die met den duivel ingescheept is, moet met hem overvaren*,—Having embarked with the Devil, you have got to sail with him."

The sound of that word "prison" was by no means agreeable in his ears. He had all a vagabond's love for open air and sunshine, and liberty to go and come at his own fitful will. He sickened at the bare idea of prison walls between him and the sky, prison bars between him and the fresh, roving air, prison restraints upon his freedom of action.

Doctor Remy saw the impression that he had made, and proceeded:—"Wherefore, if you hear, or have heard, the Major express any intention of making a new will, I need not suggest the propriety of your giving me immediate warning." The form of the sentence was that of an assertion, but the tone was interrogative.

"*Dictum sapienti sat est*," answered Dick, sulkily, denying himself the pleasure of translating, and immediately closing his lips tight, as if he dared not trust himself to say another word.

In this mood, Doctor Remy thought it better not to press him further. He had been made to see that he was in his power, and had even yielded a reluctant assent to his will; this was gain enough for the present. So, having reached the point where the roads diverged, he bade Dick

a smiling "Good-day," and turned off toward the Hall; which, it occurred to him, it might be worth while to visit, for the chance of securing useful shreds of information, or of substituting the false will for the true one.

Dick Causton looked after him with a moody, discontented brow. "I am like a leek, a gray head, and all the rest green," he groaned to himself. "I thought I had made a mighty sharp bargain, but it turns out that I've only sold myself to the Devil, to fetch and carry at his bidding. I really gave myself credit for more sense; but, *Do entra beber, sale saber*, When the drink's in, the wit's out."

With the last words, Dick heaved a deep sigh. It was nothing new to find that his darling sin was an inclined plane, down which he continually slid into the grasp of divers other sins, less to his taste; but never before had it done him so unkind a trick as to fling him into the hands of a man quick to see, and unscrupulous to use, the chance of turning him to account. Yet so completely had all courage and energy of will died out of him, and so thoroughly was he scared at the idea of a prison as a possible termination of his career, that he dared propose to himself only a feeble and covert resistance to Doctor Remy's stern domination. There was present safety in outward submission; and as for the future!—he smiled in spite of his discomfiture.

At the Hall, Doctor Remy was a little startled to find Major Bergan in the clutch of so severe an attack of *delirium tremens* that death was likely to be the speedy result. It did not suit his plans that the Major's decease should follow so quickly upon the completion of the forged will; he wanted a little more time to mark out and make smooth his future course, and obliterate his more recent track. He therefore set to work, with right good will, and science considerably in advance of the times, to strengthen and quiet his patient, and so prolong his life; certain that, whenever the strong hand of medical authority was with-

drawn, he would immediately drink himself into a relapse, which could be allowed to prove fatal. His efforts were not without a measure of success; in three hours, he had so far reduced the fever and excitement that he ventured to leave Rue in charge, while he paid a brief visit to another patient, who had sent for him four or five times during the evening. This desertion of his post was fatal to him. In spite of Rue's best endeavors, Major Bergen succeeded in getting possession of the brandy bottle, and draining it to the last drop. When Doctor Remy returned, it was to find him once more a raving maniac, and to learn to his consternation, that Bergen had been sent for. The Major would die, there was no help for that; but something must be done to prevent the arrival of his nephew until after the true will—and all other wills—had been found and destroyed, and the false one put in its place;—even, if possible, until after the funeral was over, the will read, and the property put into his own hands. Once in possession, he had reason to believe that he could not, or would not, be disturbed.

His stay at the Major's bedside was short, and principally spent in profound meditation; which was set down by the lookers-on to the account of his deep solicitude for the patient. His course was soon decided upon. In less than two hours he was back at the Rat-Hole, in deep conversation with the convalescent, who was known as "Big Ben." Its purport may be gathered from the closing remarks.

"You hit pretty hard, I suppose," said the doctor.

"Looks like it, don't it?" returned Big Ben, holding up his great fist for inspection, with a satisfied smile. "Make yourself easy; yonder lawyer won't trouble you with any cross-questions for a month to come, I'll promise you that. He won't know his head from a bread-and-milk poultice to-morrow morning, if he ever does."

"Take care!" replied the doctor, warningly; "you

know I don't want him killed,—only laid up for two or three weeks, and indisposed to meddle with other people's affairs."

Big Ben smiled grimly. "I'll take care not to do more than stun him, on your account, doctor," he answered; "but I don't say what I shall do, on my brother's. A fellow don't always weight his blows exactly to suit the skull they hit; and if I should happen to put an end to him, without meaning it, you wouldn't take it much to heart, would ye?"

Doctor Remy did not move a muscle of his face, but his eyes sparkled, in spite of himself. Ben laughed, and nodded his head.

"Don't trouble yerself to answer," said he; "I understand you well enough without."

"But, Ben—" began the doctor, in a tone of remonstrance.

"Enough said," interrupted the ruffian, impatiently. "If it's me you're afeard for, I'll jest let you know that I've got everything fixed to leave these parts, to-morrow morning—I've heard of a better opening for my talents—so I shall be off before this affair leaks out. As for you, who knows that you've got anything to do with it? It's jest our own private squarin' of accounts; that's all. You saved my life; I squelch this lawyer for you. At the same time I settle up with him, for my brother. If I swing for't, I'm not such a scoundrel as to bring you in. Now, I'm off; there's scant time to fix things, and get to the Hall by day-break. It's too late, you think, to stop him on the way?"

"Most certainly; he must have started before this."

"And his room is on the south-east corner, you say?"

"Yes, with windows opening on the second piazza."

However,—thanks to Carice,—the room was empty when Big Ben and his companion looked into it. Deter-

mined not to be baffled thus, he prowled around the house, until he was detected by Rue's quick ears in the hall, and asked what was his business; when he truthfully replied that he was seeking for Mr. Arling. Hearing this, Doctor Gerrish came forward, stated where Bergan could probably be found, and entrusted Ben with the message, which, as we have seen, was scrupulously delivered. Bergan was then knocked down; and the inanimate body was dragged by the two ruffians to what seemed to be a remote point of the Oakstead grounds, where it would not be likely to be discovered for some hours, perhaps days. There, Ben debated within himself, for a minute, whether he would leave it its small remaining chance of life; but he remembered that Bergan had seen both himself and his comrade face to face, and would be able to identify them, on occasion. He drew his knife, muttered, "Dead men tell no tales," and sheathed it in the young man's breast.

As he stood upright, his ear caught the faint jar of a closing door, followed by the sound of slow footsteps, and a cracked voice humming a song. Apparently, the spot which he had chosen, lonely as it seemed, was not far from some human dwelling. He and his companion exchanged startled glances, plunged into the underbrush, and fled silently and swiftly.

III.

FATALITY OR TEMPTATION?

DOCTOR REMY, meanwhile, had made all possible speed from the Rat-Hole to the bedside of a third patient; in order that his time, on that night, might seem to be sufficiently accounted for by his professional visits. His horse was swift, and he had not spared it in his recent expedition; it would seem impossible that he should have been at points so wide apart, within so short a time. By this means he expected to secure himself from Justice, in her human shape; of her divine form, he had no thought nor fear. Yet, all the way, a voice from the Past, which sounded curiously like his own, kept echoing in his ears, with a dull, dead intonation,—“Crime is a mistake.”

Well, suppose that it was, he had committed no crime. He had merely placed a particular powder, among many others, where a drunken old man, whose life was of no moment to anybody, could take it or not, at pleasure; he had altered a will in such manner as to give him absolute, instead of partial, control of a certain property, which he intended to use for the advance of science and the benefit of the race; and he had provided for the temporary elimination from affairs of a person likely to obstruct their proper sequence. That was all. What was there in it to cause such a chill depression of spirits,—such an unreasoning dread of—he knew not what?

Nothing, we may be sure, that was patent to the doctor's science. Regarding right merely as another term for custom, policy, expediency, and conscience as a softer name for cowardice, he was not likely to discern clearly, nor ex-

plain correctly, phenomena by which even a lost soul now and then asserts itself as of another nature than its tabernacle of dust, subject to other laws, responsive to other influences, thrilled with other pangs, fears, and longings. Nevertheless, he sought for an answer to his question, and found a plausible one in the fact that he was physically weary, and therefore mentally ill at ease. The night, too, was cool for the season, no wonder that some of its chill had gotten into his mind as well as his bones! He buttoned his overcoat more closely around him, and spurred on his flagging horse.

Yet he did not shut out the shiver, nor distance the uneasiness. Some importunate Cassandra of the depths still insisted upon its clearness of vision, in respect to impending calamity. Troubled in spite of himself, he passed his recent operations in careful review, to see if he had left any loophole open to invite detection or impediment. None. On the contrary, all seemed safe and propitious. The Major was dying, or dead, in consequence of his own self-will and folly. Bergan Arling would shortly be disabled, or killed,—but by another man's hand, and ostensibly—really, even, in part—to gratify another man's thirst for revenge. The Major's will had been found and destroyed; and another—its exact counterpart, except for the omission of a few absurd conditions and restrictions—had been put in its place. A few days more, and the vast and valuable Bergan estate would be his own, and available to his ends. If his road to its possession had not been what men accounted straight and clean, whose fault was it? Had he not, in virtue of his marked talents and abilities, a better right to wealth and fame than most men?—and was he to blame for the fatality which always placed some other life or heart between them and him? Had he not done his best to escape from it? Had he not tried more legitimate means to gain them, and failed?

If the doctor had been less intent upon special pleading,

he might have reminded himself that the records of crime show that a man seldom stops with the commission of a single theft, forgery, murder, or other offence. The first one being the necessary sequence of an evil habit of living or thinking, a second and a third follow as unavoidably as a strict logical inference from admitted premises. Might not the fatality of which he complained be but the inevitable result of indulging a certain kind of thought until it became a settled habit of mind, sure to manifest itself, on occasion, in appropriate action ? Had not this fatality first presented itself to him as a temptation, suggesting a swift means to a desired end ?—nay, was it not such still, only treading more confidently a familiar track, and finding a readier reception ?

He had no time to answer these queries, if it had occurred to him to ask them ;—he was already at his destination. With a mighty effort of his will, he tore himself free of his anxieties and doubts, and bent his mind steadily upon the surgical operation which he had come to perform ; and he performed it well, with a clear eye and a steady hand. He then went on to his office, where he found Bergan's summons to the death-bed waiting for him ; in apparent obedience to which, he soon after presented himself at the Hall.

In the avenue, he met Doctor Gerrish, who, having lost all patience at Bergan's unaccountable tardiness, had finally started for home. He instantly turned back with Doctor Remy, and waited silently, with an air of deep gravity, while the latter made a brief examination of the corpse. At first sight of it, he gave a little start ; and when he had finished his inspection, he stood silent and thoughtful. He had sneeringly committed a certain powder, he remembered, to the disposal of "Providence ;" it struck him as a little odd that it should have been kept so long, and finally used only to put a merciful end to intense bodily and mental torture. Was there really a Power overruling the acts of men, whether good or evil, to His own purposes ?

"Well!" said Doctor Gerrish, growing tired of the prolonged silence, "what do you think of it?"

Doctor Remy raised his eyes, and met the meaning glance of his colleague. "You suspect—" he began slowly, and then paused, as if not quite willing to put his thought into words.

"Poison," returned Doctor Gerrish, promptly. "Not a doubt of it. The question is, where did he get it—who gave it to him? Is it accident, or suicide, or murder? What are we to do about it?"

Doctor Remy looked down thoughtfully. He was at a loss how to treat this new complication. He had not expected it; he knew not how best to weave it into the intricate web of his plans; he wanted time to consider whether it could be turned to advantage.

"Your last question is the only one that I can answer," he said, at length,—*"let us wait. There are many things to be considered. In the first place the poison only hastened the death that was certain to come soon, anyway."*

"Are you sure of that?"

"Perfectly so. When I left the Major last night, I knew that he must be a dead man by morning. He had taken no poison then,—except the slow one that he has been taking for years."

"Nevertheless," persisted Doctor Gerrish, "it was not *that* poison which killed him."

"I suppose there was no one present, when he died, except the servants," remarked Doctor Remy.

"And Mr. Arling," answered Doctor Gerrish.

Doctor Remy lifted his eyebrows. "That looks bad," said he, gravely. "He is the heir, I suppose?"

"If you mean that it looks bad for Mr. Arling," returned Doctor Gerrish, "I do not agree with you. It was he who sent for me; and he promised to meet me here soon."

"Why is he not here, then?" asked Doctor Remy, pointedly.

"I cannot tell. He must have been unexpectedly detained."

Doctor Remy closed his lips like a man who forbears to argue, but is not convinced.

Doctor Gerrish went to the door and called Rue, who had been desired to wait outside during the examination.

"Did you notice anything unusual about your master's death?" he inquired.

"I thought he died very sudden like," answered Rue; "and so I think did Mr. Arling, for he immediately said that Doctor Remy, or some one else, must be sent for, and gave very particular directions that the body should not be disturbed before he arrived."

Doctor Gerrish shot a triumphant glance at Doctor Remy, who only smiled, shook his head, and interrogated Rue, in his turn.

"What did your master take last?"

"A powder. He insisted upon having it."

"Where is the glass from which he took it?"

"Here, sir; but it has been washed."

So it had, and so carefully that there was nothing to show what its contents had been. It also appeared that the paper in which the powder had been folded, had been used to light a candle, and was burned to ashes.

Doctor Gerrish took up the examination:—"Are there any more powders like it?"

"One, sir;—here it is. I think master said he had them from Doctor Remy."

Doctor Remy bent his head in assent, thankful that no vestige of the fatal powder was left, to make the admission dangerous. The remaining one, being examined, was proved to be innocuous. Doctor Gerrish looked puzzled.

"You see," said Doctor Remy, "that it comes back to what I said first,—we must wait. That is, until we can consult with the dead man's brother and nephew. At

what hour this afternoon will it be convenient for you to meet them, and me, here?"

"At any hour you please."

"Say three o'clock, then. I will answer for Mr. Bergan's appearance. Of course, Mr. Arling will be back—if ever—long before that time."

From the Hall, Doctor Remy hastened to Oakstead. There was an unusual quietude about the place, and he was met at the door by Mrs. Bergan, with her finger on her lips, and the low-spoken information that, after an excessively restless night, causing them all a good deal of trouble and uneasiness, Carice had fallen into a deep sleep, and must not be disturbed. Would he be good enough to step noiselessly into the parlor, and speak low?

She did her best not to seem less cordial than usual; nevertheless, it did not escape the doctor's lynx-eyed observation that her tone and manner were forced. He pondered briefly within himself what this might mean; but finally set it down to motherly anxiety for Carice, and a consequent desire to get rid of him as quickly and quietly as possible. He was willing to gratify the wish; he had too much upon his mind and hands, just now, to bestow much thought or time upon Carice. He could safely leave her case to run its own course until after she had been declared the owner of Bergan Hall; then it would be for his interest to hasten her return to reason, since it was to her reason only—her strict notions of right, and her devotion to duty—that he must look for an acknowledgment of his claims as a husband, his right to control herself and her property. He did not flatter himself that he had any strong hold upon her affections.

"Certainly, she must not be disturbed," he replied to Mrs. Bergan, after a brief pause. "Sleep, in her condition, poor child! is the best of restoratives; it also shows a decided change for the better. My present business is with her father; is he in?"

"No; he went out a short time since. He may be in the grounds, or he may have gone to the Hall."

"Then he has heard of his brother's death?"

"Yes, the news came early this morning."

"It is not necessary for me to stop, then. Please say to him that I have engaged that he shall meet Doctor Gerish, Mr. Arling, and myself, at the Hall this afternoon, at three o'clock, for an important consultation; I beg that he will not fail us. Good morning. Let me know if any change takes place in Carice; for I am likely to be so very busy for a day or two, that I may not present myself unless sent for. I was not in bed at all last night, and probably shall not be to-night. A physician's life is a slavish one."

"Yet you like it," replied Mrs. Bergan, feeling that she must say something.

"Not the general practice; I like the science. Good morning, again."

IV.

BLIND.

MR. BERGAN, meanwhile, had gone over to the Hall, partly to give a regretful look at his brother's dead face, and partly to have some further talk with Bergan. Thick-growing memories beset him, at every step of the way; and, the goal being reached, he had ample opportunity to reflect upon the sin and folly of family feuds, the miserably thin barriers which suffice to keep apart those who ought to be one in affection and interest, as in blood. He had not been very much to blame for their erection between him and his brother, but he regretted none the less that he had not wrought more perseveringly and lovingly to break them down. There had always been a generous side to Harry's character, which might have been successfully appealed to, at least in the earlier stages of the quarrel; his own influence might have been exerted for good; the dreary, empty Hall might still have been a pleasant home; this lonely death-couch might have been sweetened by the tender touch and tears of kindred hands and hearts, and sanctified by the gentle benedictions of religion. It all might have been—it could never be now! Death had closed every door to reconciliation and amendment, and written over each the mournful legend, "Too Late!"

He turned from the corpse to ask for Bergan, and was surprised to learn that nothing was known of him at the Hall since he had retired to his room just before day-break, further than that Doctor Gerrish had mentioned meeting him at Oakstead. However, being informed that two men

had inquired for him, and been sent to meet him, he took it for granted that some unexpected emergency had compelled him to hasten back to Savalla, at a moment's notice; he would be sure to return by afternoon, or send some explanation of his absence.

Meantime, Mr. Bergan was forced to fill the gap created by his departure; indeed, until his brother's will should be made known, he was both his natural and legal representative. He appointed the time, and decided the manner, of the funeral; he sent for a lawyer, and had seals affixed to all drawers and boxes likely to contain papers of value; he gave orders for the lower rooms to be cleaned and fitted, as far as might be, for the lying in state, and the reception of guests;—in short, he was kept busy until long past noon, when he was fain to go home for rest and refreshment, as well as to satisfy himself of the state of Carice. She was still sleeping peacefully, and there was no cause for alarm.

Returning to the Hall, at a few minutes past three, he found the two physicians waiting in the library, but no sign or tidings of Bergan.

"Where can my nephew be?" he exclaimed in perplexity and even displeasure.

"It is certainly very strange," replied Doctor Gerrish, gravely.

Doctor Remy said nothing; but he shrugged his shoulders in a manner sufficiently expressive of disapprobation.

Yet he would have been glad to be able to answer the question,—at least to himself. He was completely in the dark as to how Big Ben and his confederate had prospered in their evil undertaking. He knew that Bergan had not been found in his room, as was expected; but why he had gone forth so early, and whether he had encountered the ruffians, was altogether a mystery. All day, he had been holding himself ready for whatever might come,—Bergan's sudden appearance in the flesh, or the bringing in of his

dead body, or a summons to go and afford him medical aid; —he did not mean to be taken off his guard, in any case. But the suspense was trying. It had not been contemplated in his original plan; it kept his mind and nerves continually on the stretch; it gave him an uncomfortable feeling that other hands than his own were busy with the dark threads of his schemes, weaving them into patterns that he had not designed. He longed to know precisely what he had to hope or to dread.

Still, every moment of Bergan's absence was reasonable ground for belief that Big Ben had not only carried out his purpose of revenge to the full, but had succeeded wonderfully well in obliterating all trace of his work. So much the better. Bergan once removed from his path, it would become tolerably smooth and direct.

"I suppose that we shall have to proceed to business without my nephew, since he is not come," said Mr. Bergan, after a prolonged pause. "May I ask what is the object of this meeting?"

The answer to this question, although very gently given by Doctor Gerrish, was, of course, a severe shock; all the more, because Doctor Remy took care to throw in a covert insinuation that Bergan's absence betrayed some guilty connection with the disastrous event; bethinking himself that, in case the young man should escape Big Ben, he could be gotten rid of all the same, for the present, by being arrested for murder.

Doctor Gerrish, however, repelled the insinuation, as he had done before. "To my mind," said he, "everything points to the opposite conclusion. If Mr. Arling had anything to gain by poisoning his uncle, he must have gained it by staying here, and not by flight. Besides, he is too intelligent a man not to know that such flight would, in itself, arouse suspicion, and imply guilt. Having given the matter a good deal of thought, since morning, I have decided that the poisoning must have been accidental.

However, we will, with your permission, call in that old 'Maumer' and examine her a little more minutely than we did before. I have thought of several questions that it would be well to ask."

Rue was accordingly summoned from her faithful watch over her dead master. She declared positively that she had been with him from an early stage of his attack, until his death; and that he had taken only the medicines and food ordered by Doctor Remy, except the untimely drink of brandy, and the afore-mentioned powder. He had swallowed nothing whatever after the arrival of Mr. Arling,—not even the brandy for which he had called with almost his last breath.

"That certainly clears Mr. Arling," remarked Doctor Gerrish, in a low voice.

"H'm—perhaps so," rejoined Doctor Remy, meditatively. "Still, it is evidence not worth a rush, you know, in a court of law."

"It is evidence perfectly satisfactory to me, nevertheless," interposed Mr. Bergan, firmly, "and may be so to you. I, as having known Maumer Rue from my infancy, can vouch for her trustworthiness. Her testimony is as good as mine, or yours."

"Well, you ought to know best," returned Doctor Remy, carelessly. "Still, the woman is old and blind, and cannot be expected to know all that goes on in her presence. Major Bergan might have swallowed half-a-dozen things without her knowledge."

Rue had fallen into the back-ground, during this discussion; but she now stepped forward and faced Doctor Remy, drawing herself up, and smiling scornfully.

"Blind, am I?" she asked; "I am not so blind as those who have eyes, Doctor Remy. No one *saw* you open my master's private drawer last evening, during his worst paroxysm, but I *heard* you open and shut it, distinctly, and the rustling of papers, too."

If Doctor Remy was both surprised and startled, he concealed it well, thanks to the guard that he was keeping over himself. He merely looked at his companions, and said, disdainfully; "Of course, such a charge, from such a source, is too ridiculous to be contradicted. The poor old woman has mistaken one sound for another; that is all."

"It is people who live by sight that mistake sounds, Doctor Remy," returned Rue, composedly; "a woman, who has lived by hearing for over sixty years, does not. Let me give you a proof of it. These gentlemen listen to your voice, as I do, and they do not hear anything unusual in it,—nothing more than the seriousness, or the coldness, or the scorn, that fits the words; but I hear in it anxiety and perplexity and suspense and fear. Since Mr. Arling has been missing, I have suspected that you could tell us what had become of him, if you would. But while you have been talking about him here, my ears have been watching your voice, your steps, your very breath; and I know now that you do not know where he is any more than we do. You are puzzled because he does not come; you are continually expecting—I will not say, dreading—to see him, or hear of him. Is it not so?"

"And if it is," answered Doctor Remy, coolly, "what is there strange about it? Why should I not be puzzled at his unaccountable disappearance, and anxious for his speedy return?"

"Anxious?" she repeated, with a low laugh; "yes, you *are* anxious; but it will avail you nothing. Go your way, rummage drawers and cupboards, you will not find what you seek; plot and sin, you will not get what you covet. Blinder of understanding than I am of eyes, you dig, and know not that it is a pit for your own feet; you plant and water, and never remember that the expectations of the wicked shall be cut off. Master Bergan will come back, and have his own, in spite of you!"

"I am very glad to hear it," responded Doctor Remy,

with mock earnestness. Then he turned to his companions. "Her master's death has set her wits to wool-gathering," said he. "Have we any more time to listen to her maunderings?"

Rue opened her lips for a rejoinder, but Mr. Bergan, thinking that the scene had lasted long enough, though he had not been unimpressed by it, laid his hand on her arm. Instantly acknowledging his authority, as one of the family, she bent her head, and retired without a word.

Doctor Gerrish took out his watch. "I shall soon have to leave," said he. "Mr. Bergan, what is to be done about this business? I suppose it is our duty to report it to the authorities."

"If you are willing to be guided by my wishes," Mr. Bergan replied, after some consideration, "you will say nothing at present. I have no disposition to conceal a murder, if one has been committed; but, as you have well remarked, all the circumstances indicate that the poison was taken or administered accidentally. Nevertheless, there is room for evil minded persons to set afloat injurious reports concerning my nephew, while he is absent, and unable to defend himself; or these faithful servants of my brother, who, I am convinced, would not have poisoned him any sooner than I would, may be subjected to a deal of cruelty, from the fact that he was alone with them, much of the time, and their evidence, as Doctor Remy has reminded us, is worth nothing in law. Let the funeral go on, without hindrance; the body will be laid in the family vault, where it can be examined, and the presence of poison proved, at any time, if it becomes necessary. And it just occurs to me, as a possible explanation of my nephew's absence, that he may have gotten hold of some clue to this affair, and be following it up before it has time to cool. Let us wait until he appears, before we make any stir that may only thwart his efforts."

"Very well," said Doctor Gerrish. "My own prefer-

ence is always for an open, straightforward course; but if you think this one more expedient, under the circumstances, and will take the responsibility of it, I will not interfere. Good day."

V.

MORE MYSTERY.

THE funeral was over. Major Bergan, with due pomp and circumstance of woe, had been laid in the tomb of his forefathers, and left to mingle his ashes with theirs. Of all his possessions, he retained for his own behoof simply a shroud and a coffin. No good work of Church or State would miss his helping hand. He left no real, aching vacancy in any human heart. His imposing funeral train scattered to houses, places of business, and street corners, some to forget the event at once, in the absorbing interest of their own affairs; some to talk it over, and then—forget it all the same. Two or three remote cousins, sniffing the air for legacies, went back to the Hall, to wait for the reading of the will, and, meanwhile, to finish the funeral baked meats. Mr. Bergan had bidden them make themselves at home, and excused himself from accompanying them: being greatly fatigued with the manifold duties and emotions of the day, he was fain to spend the intervening time quietly at Oakstead.

He found Carice on the piazza; she had been wheeled out in an easy chair, to enjoy the beneficent air and sunshine. She was pale and feeble, but the light of restored reason shone in her eyes, and gave animation and intelligence to their expression. Also—light being the mother of shadow—it imparted to them a deep seriousness. She had taken up the problem of life precisely where it had dropped with her into the river, on the night of her wedding,—unconscious, as yet, of the length of the blank between,—and addressed herself to its solution with a

clearer brain and a firmer courage. She reflected that, in the eyes of the world and the estimation of the law, she was Doctor Remy's wife. She had publicly entered into that relation, without denial or protest; solemnly taking him as her husband, for better for worse, till death them should part. Did the fact that he had been accused of a terrible crime, absolve her from this vow? Did it not rather make it more imperatively her duty to stand by him; to help him with her countenance and sympathy, if he were innocent; to influence him to repentance and confession, if he were guilty? Was she to think only of her happiness, not at all of his good? Had he not a soul that might still be saved, as God had saved the world, by love?

Hard questions these,—demanding for their consideration a clear head, and a heart at once tender and strong. Carice, being now fully herself, had both; yet she might well delay coming to a decision so momentous. She was glad when her father's arrival broke the thread of her meditations; albeit, it was only to give her a fresh subject of anxiety. He looked so strangely old and worn,—it struck her with new wonder, new alarm, at every sight of him! How was it possible for him to change so much in the two or three days that she believed her unconsciousness to have lasted, even though weighed down by the anxiety consequent upon his interview with Bergan?—an interview which could not have been without definite result, since she saw nothing of Doctor Remy. Indeed, his name had been mentioned to her but once, and then in terms of manifest constraint, though of apparent excuse for his absence. No doubt her father had taken the thought of his possible guilt very sorely to heart; no doubt, too, he blamed himself severely for his advocacy of the marriage. She must not let him do that! She knew so well that he had meant it for the best,—that he had erred in judgment only, never in intention,—that pure, strong, unselfish love for her had been the deep motive of his every act. Her heart was

very tender, very pitiful, toward him as he came up the gravel-walk, with that slow, stooping gait, and those sudden gray hairs, which made her feel, every time that she saw him, as if she must have been dreaming for years, or was dreaming now.

He brightened visibly at sight of her. He was thankful, with all his heart, for her restoration, even though it but served to increase his perplexities. For how was she to be given to understand, without a harmful shock, that a year of her life had passed her by, and made no sign? With what face could he break it to her that the man whom he had urged upon her as a husband, was likely to prove a murderer? What answer was he to make when she inquired after Bergan, as he was constantly expecting her to do?

Needless anxieties, all, as he would duly discover. Carice was already feeling her way to the truth, as regarded the lapse of time, by means of the incomprehensible changes that she saw about her; it would not so much shock her as satisfy her with a reasonable explanation of them. The accusation against Doctor Remy would be no surprise to her; on the contrary, its dark shadow continually fell athwart her mind, and prompted or modified all her thoughts. Moreover, as long as her duty to Doctor Remy was in question, she conscientiously checked every thought, every wish, every emotion of curiosity even, that wandered toward Bergan. Knowing nothing of all this, however, and fearing lest she should seize upon this opportunity to ask for the full explanation that he was so loath to make, Mr. Bergan began a lengthened account of the funeral ceremonies. He had deemed it wise to tell her of her uncle's death, both as affording a good excuse for postponing other matters, and as a reason for his own troubled and abstracted face.

He was still busy with this theme, doing his best to imitate the gold-beater's art of making a little material

cover a large space, when he heard a footfall behind him, on the gravel walk. Looking quickly round, he was delighted to behold his nephew coming up the steps, just as he had first seen him two years before, with the same half-eager, half-hesitating expression of one who feels himself at once a relative and a stranger; yet mingled in the present instance, with what seemed an inappropriate sternness. The sight of him was none the less a relief to his uncle.

"Thank Heaven! you are come at last, Bergan!" he exclaimed, starting up to go and meet him.

But Carice put forth a staying hand,—the eyes of love are not so easily deceived. "You mistake, father," she said, in a low and half-frightened voice, "this is not Bergan, though he is like him."

The new comer took off his hat, and bowed low. "No, I am not Bergan; I am Hubert," he said, but with no friendliness of tone or manner. "And you, I suppose, are my uncle Godfrey. I am come to look for my brother. What have you done with him among you? Where can I find that villanous Doctor Remy, who, four days ago, made one attempt on his life (or on mine, mistaking me for him), and has now probably—"

He was startled and silenced by a low, pathetic cry of distress, that found an instant way to his heart, despite its armor of prejudice and anger. At the same moment, Carice fell, white and insensible, across the arm of her chair.

"You have killed her," said Mr. Bergan, not resentfully, but with the still resignation of a man who feels that fate has done its worst for him, and there is little left to dread, and less to hope.

"Indeed, I trust not," replied Hubert, earnestly, dismayed at the mischief that he had done, as well as softened by the sweet, death-like face, which, he now knew, was not only the one that still kept its place in Bergan's memory, and would not be cast out, but was correlated to a heart not less interested than his own in Bergan's fate. "I think

she has only fainted. Let me take her in, while you summon assistance."

And without waiting for either consent or remonstrance, he lifted her in his strong arms, and carried her to the library. Almost immediately, she showed signs of returning animation. He then withdrew to the piazza, where Mr. Bergan shortly joined him ; and explanations were mutually given and received.

Hubert had duly received the notice of his uncle's funeral. It had struck him as a little odd at first, that it should be addressed jointly to his brother and himself ; but he set it down as an absurd legal formality, and thought no more about it. He had intended to ride over this morning, in time for the funeral ; but just as he was about to start, Mr. Youle had slipped and fallen on the office steps, and received several severe cuts and bruises ; which had made it necessary for him to take him home, and do what he could to assist him and reassure his family. Thus it happened that he had arrived at the Hall to find the funeral over, and to learn, to his surprise and alarm, that his brother was not there, and that nothing was known of his whereabouts, except that he was last seen at Oakstead. There, also, he was told Doctor Remy might be found. Accordingly he had hastened thither.

He now proposed to commence an immediate, thorough search for his brother.

"Take my advice," said Mr. Bergan, "and wait a little longer. I have had, all along, an expectation—or, at least, a hope—that my brother's will would give some clue to all these mysteries. The time fixed for the reading is now at hand. Go with me, and be present thereat, as you have a right to be. Then, if we get any clue, I will do my utmost to help you follow it out ; if we do not, I shall be equally at your service to seek for one elsewhere."

Chafing at the delay, but unable to suggest anything better to be done, Hubert accompanied his uncle to the

Hall. In the library they found a considerable party assembled, discussing Bergan's mysterious disappearance.

"I hope," Doctor Remy was just saying, with apparent concern, "that nothing worse is behind it all, than some foolish whim or *escapade*,"—when, hearing a step at the door, he turned and met Hubert Arling's stern, threatening gaze. In spite of his consummate self-control, he could not help giving a violent start. Recollecting himself instantly, however,—inasmuch as he had just heard of Hubert's previous visit,—he came forward and held out his hand.

"You have deceived me twice, Mr. Arling," he said, pleasantly; "your resemblance to your brother is really quite wonderful, and must lead to many entertaining mistakes. I have to beg your pardon," he went on, in a lower tone, "for my absurd conduct at our former meeting; I will explain to you, by and by, what I had been led, by some malicious persons, to believe that I might expect from your brother; which indignity I hastily attempted to forestall. I have since learned my error, and I now beg you to believe that I have the most friendly feelings toward you both. I am scarcely less concerned than yourself at your brother's absence, on this occasion."

Hubert drew back. "I take no man's hand which I have reason to believe is not clean," said he, haughtily. "As to your relations with my brother, he can settle them with you himself, if he still lives. If he does not, I warn you that any man whom I suspect to have been anywise concerned in his death, will meet with little mercy at my hands."

Doctor Remy turned livid with anger. Before he could reply, Mr. Tatum (the lawyer whom Mr. Bergan had summoned) rapped on the table to command attention, and held up the will to view, in order to show that the seals were unbroken. He then read it, slowly and distinctly. After a few minor legacies, it gave the bulk of the Major's property unconditionally to his niece, Carice Bergan.

There was a dead silence after the formal voice had ceased.

"Is that will in due form of law?" asked Mr. Bergan, breaking the pause.

"It seems so," replied Mr. Tatum. "it is clearly worded, and duly signed and witnessed."

"I drew it up myself," observed Doctor Remy, "as you see. It was over a year ago, before the legatee became my wife. But I am surprised to hear it read on this occasion; I supposed that it grew out of a momentary whim, and had long ago been nullified by some other instrument."

"I am equally surprised," remarked Mr. Tatum, "for the excellent reason that I drew up a very different will myself, only about a fortnight since. At that time, Major Bergan mentioned this one, or some other,—for the provisions of this do not quite answer his description,—and I advised him to destroy it, in order to prevent any trouble."

"He may have returned to his first mind, and destroyed the second will instead," suggested Doctor Remy.

"I cannot believe it," returned Mr. Tatum. "Suppose we go in a body, and make a fresh search. Do you know, Mr. Bergan, any other receptacle of papers than those already examined?"

"I do not," replied Mr. Bergan. "Perhaps Maumer Rue might; she knows the house, as well as my brother's habits, much better than I do."

Strange to say, however, when Rue was sought for, she was nowhere to be found. As messenger after messenger returned from the chambers, the quarter, and the grounds, and reported that no trace of her could be discovered, Doctor Remy and Mr. Bergan looked at each other in blank amazement. This new disappearance was equally startling and suspicious to both; each thought that the other must be privy to it; each wondered what it portended.

"So much the more reason to search," finally said Mr. Tatum; "we have two things to look for,—the will and the old woman."

Hubert Arling rose. "I must beg to be excused," said

he. "I have neither time nor inclination to search for anybody, or anything, except my brother."

Mr. Bergan laid his hand warningly on his shoulder. "It seems to me," said he, "that you cannot begin your search better than in this house."

The search began. Not a corner was left unexplored, not a shadow left undisturbed. Many strange relics of olden time were unearthed, much venerable dust raised, but it was all unavailing, so far as either the will or the blind woman was concerned.

Tired and disappointed, they returned to the library. Then Doctor Remy stood forth with the light of triumph shining in his eyes. He had schemed and sinned to some purpose; his reward was sure.

"I suppose that nothing remains," said he, "but for me to take possession of the premises, in the name of my wife."

Mr. Bergan looked inquiringly at Mr. Tatum. "I suppose that is the proper thing," said the lawyer,—“at least, as long as the other will is not found.”

Hubert's long-repressed impatience here broke forth. "Settle this matter as you like," said he, "*I* am going to look for my brother."

He strode out of the room. Mr. Bergan hesitated a moment, and then followed him. At the door, he was met by a servant from Oakstead, who delivered a message, in a low tone; of which Doctor Remy, who was standing near, caught the words, "Richard Causton—business of importance." Mr. Bergan listened half-impatiently, gave a brief answer, and hastened after Hubert.

Doctor Remy watched them down the avenue, with a clouded brow. The triumphant light had gone out in his eyes; a chill premonition of evil was at his heart; already he seemed to feel his prize slipping from his hand. "Excuse me," he said, hurriedly, to those who remained, "I have urgent business to attend to." In another moment he was on his horse, galloping swiftly across the fields.

VI.

HELP AT HAND.

DICK CAUSTON'S cottage—as it was called by courtesy, being, in truth, only a better sort of cabin—stood on a sandy corner of the estate that he had formerly owned. At first, he had begged to remain there only until he could fix upon some more eligible place of abode; but the owner was good natured, and Dick was indolent to the point not only of letting well enough alone, but bad enough, too; so it gradually came to be understood that he was a life-tenant, by sufferance, of the place. Nor did the owner deem it worth while to interfere, when, in course of time, Dick made the discovery that the sand composing this small domain was of superior quality, and proceeded to convert it into cash, at the rate of two or three pennies a load, and to swallow it a second time, in the shape of alcohol. The process ceased only when the digging threatened to undermine the cottage; which was thus left high and dry upon a triangular sand promontory, with a deep excavation on each side. The base of the triangle—a part of it, at least—touched the boundary line of Oakstead, very near the point where Bergan had been left for dead by “Big Ben.”

Dick had risen unusually early on that morning. Owning to his sudden flight from the Rat-Hole, he had failed to replenish his stock of brandy, as he had designed; and the small quantity on hand had been insufficient to blunt the thorns in his pillow, planted partly by Doctor Remy's threats, and partly by the reproaches of his own conscience. He had tossed about on their sharp points for the better

part of the night, and was glad when dawn brought such a measure of relief as was to be derived from movement and occupation. In the absence of stronger stimulant, he was fain to brace his nerves with a cup of tea; to which end a fire was unfortunately necessary, and fuel must be sought in the adjoining woods of Oakstead. While engaged in this task, he caught sight of a prostrate form, half-hidden in the underbrush.

*"Quien busca, hallará,—*He who seeks will find, but he cannot tell what," he muttered, peevishly. "Is the fellow drunk, or only asleep, I wonder?"

He stole some paces nearer, then gave a start and stopped; he had seen blood stains on the man's clothing. At the same moment, the lines of the figure struck him as familiar, and while he strove to identify them, a light breeze lifted the leaves of an overhanging bush, and revealed an easily recognized profile. Immediately he was kneeling by Bergan, trying his best to discover some sign of life.

He was unsuccessful; yet, thanks to his store of proverbs, he did not quite despair. "No barber shaves so close that another cannot find work," he said, encouragingly, to himself, and bent all his energies to the difficult task of dragging Bergan into his cabin. He dared not wait to call assistance, none being within easy reach; besides, he reasoned that the transit, if not too ungently managed, would tend to restoration rather than otherwise. Moreover, having at once connected Doctor Remy with Bergan's condition, and being thereby inspired with an inordinate dread of the doctor's power to harm, he fancied that the first necessity was to get the young man into a place of concealment.

"A good heart rids work," he murmured exultingly, when, panting and exhausted, after many a pause for breath, and many a start of fright, he at length dragged Bergan across his threshold, and closed and locked the door.

He next applied himself, with good will and not unskilfully, to the task of restoring animation. The wound, it appeared, had touched no vital part—Big Ben's intention having been better than his aim—and, being helped by the position in which Bergan had lain, it had stanchd itself. The blows of Ben's heavy fist had been much more effective. Dick wellnigh gave up in despair before his efforts were rewarded by the faintest sign that the soul had not forever quitted its earthly house. Taking heart then, he worked on till the eyes opened and the lips moved, but not with intelligent sight or coherent speech. The one beheld only the misty phantoms, as the other gave utterance but to the wild fancies, of a fevered and delirious imagination. Now, his uncle's death-bed was the gloomy subject of Bergan's ravings; now, he beheld Carice in danger or distress, and sought to hasten to her relief, making it necessary for Dick to hold him in bed by main strength.

For two nights and three days, Dick had thus been forced to keep watch over him, not daring to leave him for a moment, lest he should do himself irremediable harm, during his absence. Nor was he disinclined to the task. Bergan had won all his heart by the courtesy and consideration with which he had uniformly treated him, no less than his admiration by his fearless, upright character. "Your nephew has all my best proverbs in his life, whereas, I only have them in my head," he had once remarked to the Major, by way of lavishing his choicest encomium upon the rejected heir; and he now did his best for the young man's comfort and cure, with the somewhat meagre appliances at his command. In the way of nourishment, the cabin afforded only a little tea and beef broth; in the way of medicine, nothing but two or three soothing herb-drinks, cold water, pure air, and perfect silence. With the three last, however, nature can work wonders; and, in this case, she wrought so effectively that, on the afternoon of

the third day, Bergan sank into a quiet sleep, to awake in great weakness, but fully himself.

"Where am I?" he asked, feebly, glancing wonderingly around him.

"Where charity begins—at home," answered Dick, graciously; "that is, if you will continue to make yourself so, as you have been doing for the last three days."

"Three days!" exclaimed Bergan, trying to spring up, but failing by reason of his weakness;—"what do you mean?"

Dick saw his mistake, but it was too late to retreat. Bergan's mind had at once recurred to the last item in his memory,—namely, Big Ben's uplifted fist,—and had easily connected it with his present condition. Being now made aware of the lapse of time since then by Dick's incautious admission, nothing remained but to give truthful answers to the questions that he rapidly put. Quick at logical inference, the facts that he had disappeared suddenly, and that no trace of him had been found, were soon patent to him. He was filled with dismay. What distress his mysterious absence must have cost his friends! What evil use of it might have been made by his enemy! At the thought, he made another attempt to rise, and partially succeeded, but only to fall back again, half fainting.

"Take care. *Quien mas corre, menos vuela*,—the more haste the worst speed," said Dick, warningly. "Stay a little, and news will find you."

"Not until it is too late, I fear," returned Bergan. "Since I cannot do it myself, I must beg you to go immediately to my Uncle Godfrey, and let him know that I am here, and ask him to come and see me at once, if possible. Tell him privately, so as not to startle anybody else," he added, with a thought of Carice; "and leave him to extend the information to whomsoever he pleases."

"I would much rather go to your Uncle Harry," ob-

jected Dick, loath to present himself at Oakstead, lest he should encounter Doctor Remy.

"He is dead," answered Bergan gravely.

Dick looked astonished, but muttered, resignedly,—
"God sends no more than can be borne." Then he bowed low to Bergan. "*Dopo un papa, se ne fa un altro*," said he,—
"The King is dead, long live the King; I congratulate you."

"Upon what?" asked Bergan, with a keen glance;—
"Doctor Remy's succession?"

"Of course not," replied Dick, coloring and laughing.
"Doctor Remy will find out that *Den sviges værst, som sviger sig selv*,—He is worse cheated who cheats himself. But," he added, with a quick change of countenance, "he must have found it out already."

The thought was a startling one. Much as Dick had enjoyed the certainty of the doctor's final discomfiture, he had not expected that it would come so soon; nor had he known, as now, the extent of the doctor's resources in the way of his interest or his vengeance. As he pondered the matter, he was dismayed to recognize in the false will, the Major's death, and the attempt on Bergan's life, apparent parts of the same plan, and to infer therefrom the subtle and determined character of the man whom he had ventured to try to outwit. Had he succeeded? If so, he had everything to dread from the doctor's resentment; if not—if Doctor Remy had found means to carry out his plans to the end, and cover his tracks, as he seemed to have done thus far—would *he* dare to open his mouth against him, only to take a share in his punishment? Right and honor were good things, but could they make a prison a pleasant abode?

Here, Bergan broke in upon his troubled reflections. "I must remind you," said he, "that no time should be wasted. My disappearance must have caused much anxiety, and my uncle should be informed where I am, without delay."

"Very well," said Dick, glad, on the whole, to be relieved from further consideration of his difficulties. "I'll be off instanter, if you'll promise not to stir while I'm gone. And if anybody knocks, don't speak, or even breathe loud;—likely enough it will be Doctor Remy, and, in your case, discretion is the better part of valor. I'll make all fast behind me, so that no one can get in. And I'll hurry back, and bring your uncle with me, if I can."

At Oakstead, Dick was informed that Mr. Bergan was at the Hall, and wherefore. He dared not go after him, knowing that Doctor Remy would certainly be there also. He debated with himself, for a moment, whether it would not be well to make his errand known to Mrs. Bergan; but murmuring cynically, "A woman conceals only what she don't know," he decided to entrust her with a message simply. This was so mysteriously and solemnly given, however, as necessarily to suggest to her, after his departure, that he might possibly have found some clue to the mystery of Bergan's absence; whereupon she dispatched a servant to the Hall with the message,—though not without a strict injunction that he should deliver it to his master privately. But this, as has been seen, was not so well observed as to prevent some portion of the message from reaching Doctor Remy's ears, and exciting his suspicions.

VII.

THE SET TIME.

DICK CAUSTON trudged back to his cabin in no tranquil frame of mind. He had his own excellent reasons for believing that a more disappointed and angry man than Doctor Remy, at that moment, was not to be found under the sun. Not only had he lost the coveted Bergan estate, but he had been fooled and cheated by the very man whom he had taken to be his most willing and despicable tool. Nor would it be long, Dick foresaw, before the doctor would seek to mitigate the bitterness of his chagrin with whatever sweetness was to be derived from the thought and purpose of revenge. In that case, he would be the first point of attack. What a fool he had been to meddle or make with any of the doctor's affairs! As if he did not know at least a dozen different proverbs in as many languages, to the effect that prudence was better than repentance, safety preferable to sorrow! Of what use was it to have his head stuffed with the consummate wisdom of all nations, if he only acted like a consummate idiot!

A pertinent question, Richard Causton! Showing the good results, too, of your period of forced abstinence from strong drink, and your lonely watch over the sick-bed—wellnigh the death-bed—of Bergan Arling. Up to this point, we have deemed your case hopeless; now, truly, we think better of it. To recognize one's folly is the first step toward breaking from its bondage. To have learned that the fruits of righteousness do not ripen on the tree of worldly wisdom, is, perhaps, to feel the first faint hunger for the saving fruitage of the tree of life. There may be

the making of a man—a contrite, humbled, subdued, scarred, but free man—in you yet!

Ignoring, or unconscious of, these grounds of hope for the future, however, Dick continued to busy himself with his fears for the present. Nor did they prove to be causeless; he was not yet in sight of his door, when he heard the sound of impatient knocking thereat. Stealing to a point where he could see without being seen, his worst fears were realized,—the unwelcome visitor was Doctor Remy.

*“De puerta cerrada el diablo se torna,—*From a locked door, the devil turns away,” he muttered, settling himself in his hiding place, with the intention of remaining there until the anticipated departure.

But the doctor was not to be thus balked. After repeated knockings, with short intervals of waiting, he finally drew back from the door with the evident intention of bursting it in; whereupon Dick hastened to make his appearance, doing his best to assume an air of easy nonchalance.

“He who brings good news, knocks hard,” he called out, by way of arresting the doctor’s attention, and saving the door. “Or, as the Germans say, He who brings, is welcome; I suppose you have come to settle our little account.”

“Yes, I *have* come to settle accounts with you,” replied Doctor Remy, with grim irony. “Why didn’t you tell me about this other will?”

“What other will?” asked Dick, innocently.

“I am in no humor for trifling,” returned Doctor Remy; —“Major Bergan’s will, that you witnessed a fortnight ago.”

*“C’est la glose d’ Orleans,—*that is to say, the commentary is more obscure than the text,” answered Dick, shaking his head, as if he could make nothing of it.

“Don’t try my patience too far,” rejoined the doctor,

menacingly. "I have just seen Mr. Tatum, and he told me of the will, and named you as one of the witnesses."

"Did he?" asked Dick, shrugging his shoulders. "Then I must be like '*el escudero de Guadalajara, que de lo que dice de noche, no hay nada á la mañana.*' Do you understand Spanish?"

"Do *you* understand English?" growled Doctor Remy. "I asked you if you had witnessed a will; and I want to know what was in it."

"And I gave you to understand that if I had, it must have been when I was too drunk to remember anything about it," responded Dick.

Doctor Remy's eyes flashed ominously. "I shall find a way to refresh your memory," said he. "One question more, and I warn you that you had better give me a straightforward answer, and not try to put me off with a proverb;—what was done with the will after it was made?"

"Why, hasn't it been found?" asked Dick, with surprise that was plainly genuine.

"No, it has not," replied Doctor Remy, curtly. "See here, Dick," he added, after a pause, quitting his threatening tone for one of persuasion; "I'll make it well worth your while to tell me all you know about that will. Open the door—I'm tired of standing—and we'll go in and talk it over."

"I—I—it's pleasanter outside," stammered Dick, fairly driven to his wit's end by this proposal. "Besides, 'walls have ears;' no place like the open air for your business—and mine."

"Your walls should be deaf," answered the doctor, looking at him suspiciously; "you live alone, do you not?"

"Yes, certainly; but no walls are to be trusted; *méfiance est mère de sûreté.*"

"Very true," replied Doctor Remy; "and I distrust you.

Open that door at once, and let me see what or whom it is, that you are so anxious to conceal."

Dick's consternation was extreme. Still, he did what he could to gain time; assistance might be on the road. He began to fumble in his pockets. "Very happy to oblige you, I'm sure," he faltered, with a poor assumption of graciousness. "But, 'He that will be served must be patient.' I declare! I believe I've lost that key! Still, *Mais val perdre, que mais perd*—"

"Will you open that door?" interrupted Doctor Remy, fiercely, "or shall I do it myself?"

Dick lifted his head boldly; his straining ears had caught the sound of distant footsteps. "A man's house is his castle," he began;—but Doctor Remy stopped the rest of the sentence in his throat, with one hand, while he thrust the other into his pocket for the key. Dick uttered a smothered cry. Immediately Doctor Remy heard the door tried from within; the next moment, the window beside it was flung open, and the pale, stern face of Bergan Arling met his astonished sight.

At the same instant, he saw several persons emerging from the shadow of the Oakstead woods. Mr. Bergan, Hubert Arling, and Doctor Gerrish, he recognized at a glance, and he stayed to recognize no more:—these, in conjunction with Bergan—alive, and in possession of his faculties—were enough to show him that his deep-laid scheme had come to naught, that the prize for which he had thought, labored, and sinned, was snatched from his hands in the very moment of success. Some important figure—could it be Providence?—had been overlooked or changed in his calculations, and made them all come wrong.

Yet he had failed before. Bitterly he acknowledged to himself that, despite his rich natural endowments of intellect, courage, will, and resource, his life had been, on the whole, a succession of failures. The consequences of one early mistake had followed, hampered, modified, and de-

feated, every effort that he had made to rise above a certain level of station, fortune, or reputation. Nevertheless, he had saved from every wreck, thus far, an unbroken spirit and an inexhaustible invention. What was there in the present one to cause his heart to shiver and shrink with so deadly a chill of despair, to smite him with so heavy an intuition that the measure of his opportunities for good or evil was full, and that some set time of reckoning was at hand? Nay, he *would not* be daunted! There *must* be some expedient—some bold stroke or crafty subterfuge—by which he could still wring safety, at least, from the hands of defeat.

He ran his eye over the scene of his recent operations, as a general might scan a disastrous battle-field. Instantly, the intercepted letters, the forged will, the poisoned powder, the attack on Bergan Arling, set themselves in order before him,—revolted soldiers, once his obedient servants, now gone over to the enemy. No! the odds were too great. Nothing was left him but flight;—nay, it was a question if even that remained,—pursuit was so near! Still, it must be tried.

Giving Dick a final choke, to render him incapable of immediate action, he flung him on the ground, and fled towards the nearest bank. Once across the excavation, there was a thick wood beyond, in which he would quickly be lost to sight; and the present was all he had time to think of; the future must care for itself. One moment his tall form was seen, by the approaching party, on the edge of the bank, clearly defined against the twilight sky; the next, it sank suddenly from view, both hands raised, apparently in a mocking gesture of farewell, or it might be, of defiance.

Hubert Arling immediately recognized the fugitive, and hastened after him. Arrived at the brink of the excavation, he was amazed to find that Doctor Remy was nowhere in sight, although it seemed incredible that he could have

traversed the sandy chasm so quickly. Nothing daunted, however, Hubert leaped the precipice, half-burying himself in the soft sand at the bottom, struggled across, climbed the opposite bank—taking much more time, it seemed to him, than his predecessor had done—and plunged into the wood beyond. Here, he soon found that all the odds were against him; the underbrush was thick, the wood was soon merged in a dense juniper swamp; the twilight was deepening; a hundred men might easily elude his single search. It was necessary to go back and obtain organized assistance.

He was rejoiced to find Bergan in the cabin, though his state was such as to cause intense anxiety. The great exertion that he had made to interfere between Doctor Remy and Dick—believing the latter to be in danger of losing his life in behalf of his guest—had caused his wound to re-open; and when Dick recovered himself sufficiently to make it known that Bergan was within, and to unlock the door, he was found on the floor under the window, in a death-like faint. Doctor Gerrish, however, at once took him in hand, with great personal good will, and no small amount of medical efficiency. And no sooner was he pronounced out of immediate danger—although he had relapsed into fever and delirium—than Hubert's mind recurred to the intermitted pursuit of Doctor Remy. From the first, he had shared Doctor Trubie's suspicions, and having now heard the several stories of Mr. Bergan, Doctor Gerrish, and Dick, and pretty accurately divined their logical connection and drift, he was strongly of the opinion that the doctor's evil career should be brought to a close. No consideration of family, friendship, or love, he thought, should interfere to save him from richly deserved punishment, and leave him at large to work new wickedness. So thinking, he put his thoughts into prompt, resolute, persevering action.

But it was wholly in vain. If the earth had opened and swallowed him up, Doctor Remy could not have disappeared more effectually. Far and near, no trace was found of his

course, no clue to his hiding place. The flight of a bird through the air, the dart of a fish through the wave, do not leave less visible track behind. Day by day, Hubert had to acknowledge himself baffled, puzzled, confounded ; but he would not be discouraged. Doctor Trubie having been sent for, had joined him, and between the two, the search went obstinately on.

VII.

GIFT AND GIVER.

CARICE was in her own room. Her face was pale, her mouth and eyes deeply serious. At last, she had been put in possession of all the facts hitherto concealed from her. She knew by what base means she had been separated from Bergan, and married to a man known to be a forger, suspected to be a murderer, and now a fugitive from justice. She was also aware that, so far as her own consciousness went, she had lost a year out of her life. None the less, she felt in her deep heart that her soul had not stood still during this suspension of certain of her faculties, but had accomplished some rapid, sensible growth. She was not, in all respects, the same Carice who had fallen through the gap in the foot-bridge. She contemplated her situation with far less dismay and bewilderment than that immaturer self could have done; in some mysterious way, her year of unconsciousness had been also a year of preparation for the difficulties that it had postponed; she now faced them with a deeper insight, a broader comprehension, and a calmer courage. She blinded herself with no subtleties nor evasions; she dimmed the clear medium of her integrity with no selfish breath; but counted herself what that solemn marriage ceremony had made her—a wife. She must remain such until the plea of “wilful desertion for a year,” in the courts of law, should secure for her a certain personal freedom. But even then, she would be only a deserted wife;—in her opinion, divorce was powerless except as regarded separation. The virtual relation, she believed, could only be dissolved by death; and that

meant, in this case, perhaps, the arrest, conviction, and execution of Doctor Remy. She shuddered at the thought. She could not wish the barrier between Bergan and herself to be thus removed.

Bergan?—She dared not think of him! He was lying so dangerously ill!—yet she must not go to him;—she could trust neither her thoughts nor herself by that bedside. She must just leave him, where she left all her own cares and sorrows, in the hands of God. She waited upon Him: in His own good time and way, He would make it clear that He reigned, and that His sceptre was justice, and His crown mercy.

Mrs. Bergan opened the door. “My child,” she asked, tenderly, “would you like to see a visitor?”

“Whom?” asked Carice, with a little wonder;—her mother had been so careful to spare her all intrusion, during these trying days.

Mrs. Bergan shook her head. “I really don’t know; I was so taken with her face, that I forgot to ask her name. She said that she was a friend of Astra Lyte’s, and of—Bergan’s.”

“Mamma, could I not be excused?”

“I suppose so,—if you really wish it. But you would never think of refusing her, if you once saw her; she has such a princess-like way with her, as if she had never been refused anything in her life—except happiness. She has the most beautiful face that I ever saw, but there is a shadow over it, as if she had known great sorrow.”

Carice felt a jealous pang. Beautiful! and Bergan’s friend? Sad? of course, since he was in danger!

Mrs. Bergan went on. “She said she had a story to tell you. And when I hesitated—fearing that it might be some new trouble or excitement—you have had enough such, of late, dear—she smiled, as if she knew what I was thinking, and said,—‘Have no fear, madam; my story will do her good, not harm!’ Shall I let her come up?”

An hour after, the door of Bergan's sick-room opened gently. His eyes were closed; he, too, had been thinking, as deeply as his weak, half unconscious state permitted; and his thoughts had been strangely like those of Carice. The tangled web left behind by Doctor Remy would be hard to unravel, he felt; and in the process, there would be much pain, loss, anxiety, and disgrace,—especially for Carice. His heart ached for her;—and a little also—for he was very weak and weary—for himself. Would it not be well to have done with it all,—to let thought, care, and life drift away together, as they seemed so ready to do, if only he ceased to hold them back? It would be so much easier to let them go!—was there really any good reason why he should try to live?

Hearing the door close, and the sound of light footsteps, he languidly opened his eyes. Diva Thane was standing at his bedside, holding the blushing Carice by the hand, and smiling down upon him with eyes deep-lit by a mysterious radiance. There was a lofty beauty in her face, a look of victory after conflict, that he had never seen there before.

His heart gave a great bound. He remembered his strange, repeated intuition that that fair, firm hand would some day bestow upon him an inestimable blessing. Was the time come?

"I bring you a gift," said she, in low, rich tones, full of feeling as of melody. "This little, maiden hand—free from every claim as from every stain—is the best return that I can make for what you have done for me." And, placing Carice's hand in his, she added, solemnly:—"I give it to you, for I have the right: I am the wife of Edmund Roath."

The rush of joy was almost too great. It swept over Bergan's senses like a great whelming wave; speech and sound were lost in it; sight was gone, except for Carice's sweet, fair face, the one point of light in a vast ocean of

blackness; feeling was annihilated, save that he clung to that dear hand as to the one treasure that he would not be parted from, let him be carried whither he might. Firmly and tenderly it closed upon his, too,—seeming to be the only thing which kept him from drifting out into that wide obscurity, and brought him back to the steady standing-ground of consciousness. There he was met by a rush of gratitude and sympathy only a little less overpowering. He knew so well what that avowal had cost Diva's pride! He understood so clearly whence came that solemn light of sacrifice in her eyes, that exalted beauty in her face, and how dearly it had been won! Still holding Carice fast with one hand, he held out the other to her, with emotion too deep for aught but a benediction.

"God bless you," he murmured, fervently. And he added, in a tone of entire conviction;—"I am sure He will."

She bent her graceful head,—no longer haughty in its pose,—gave his hand an earnest, heartening pressure, and glided from the room.

All gentle, delicate souls, all sympathetic hearts, go with her; curiosity, coldness, rudeness, must needs follow after. In that sick-room, Love only may remain,—Love which, by its long patience of sorrow, its steady conscientiousness, its freedom from all self-seeking, has won at last its blessed right to be,—and to be happy!

At a little distance from the cabin was a huge ilex tree, in the broad, low shade of which Dick had once been moved to set up a rude bench. Thither Diva betook herself to wait for Carice. There was a pleasant enough prospect before her, beyond the gulf of sand,—the creek on its sunshiny way to the sea, the pines and water oaks mingling their moss-hung boughs and diverse verdure,—but it is doubtful if she was aware of it. Her eyes—whether bent on the ground at her feet, or lifted to some far point of the blue

horizon—spoke plainly of a mind too busy with its own reflections to be anywise cognizant of outward objects. She was reviewing the main events of her life by the new light recently shed on them, discovering a connection, a harmony, and a meaning in them unsuspected before, and gaining thereby a deeper sense of the might and wisdom of that overruling Providence in whom she had come so lately to believe.

She had been reared in almost princely affluence, as well as in professed scepticism;—every material wish gratified, every material caprice humored; no spiritual want recognized, no spiritual yearning indulged. Early accustomed to admiration and adulation, she grew up proud, imperious, self-reliant, counting herself made of more excellent clay than often went to the fashioning of human organisms, as she was certainly endowed with an intellect of no common strength and fineness of fibre, which her father took care to feed with all his own learned and labored Philosophy of Doubt. She was taught to scorn faith, to deride inspiration, to scoff at worship, to acknowledge no law but her own will, no higher rule of life than "*Noblesse oblige.*" Yet she had generous impulses and strong affections; the very weeds that grew to such rank luxuriance in her character bore witness to the natural richness of the soil. Nor was she without a deep, innate reverence, inherited from the mother that she had never known,—which, being diverted from its proper objects, fell to deifying human genius and intellect, and suffered sorely in seeing them betray, soon or late, how much of their substance was human dust. Disappointed thus in the concrete, she turned to the abstract; first Song, then Art, became the idol of her imagination, the object of her devoted worship. Her father's health failing about this time, both looked to Italy as their natural goal, the one for healing, the other for culture. There they met the man whose potent influence was to change the whole current of her life.

He had everything necessary to recommend him to her favor;—a manly figure and bearing, regular, clear-cut features, a bold, acute, powerful intellect, and varied culture. Moreover, there was a mystery about him which acted as a stimulant to interest. No one knew whence he came, and he gave no account of himself beyond what was to be inferred from chance words and phrases, coming by accident, as it were, to the surface of the stream of conversation,—oracular utterances, capable of diverse construction;—which, after being long brooded over in her imagination, were turned into such rich, airy, poetic shapes, as even he, with all his subtlety, would never have thought of suggesting. None the less, they did him friendly service. Moreover, he had, in some way, acquired no small amount of medical science, which he put to good use in alleviating her father's sufferings, although it had become evident that his malady was incurable. By this means, he soon acquired such an ascendancy over the invalid's mind, and so firm a hold upon his confidence, as to lead him easily to believe that he could do nothing better for his child's future than to commit it to such strong, kind, wise hands. Accordingly, she was wedded, in the American Consulate at Rome, to Earle Roy; under which suggestive name she had no doubt was hidden a disguised noble, an exiled prince, or some equally exalted seeker after disinterested love or sufficing consolation.

Descending the staircase, immediately after the ceremony, they met a travel-stained gentleman coming up, who started at sight of her husband, and uttered the name of "Edmund Roath." *He* started in his turn, and grew deadly pale; nevertheless, he haughtily affirmed that it was "a mistake," conducted her home, begged to be excused while he attended to some forgotten formality, and left her with the careless smile and bow that argues an immediate return. Hours passed,—days passed,—yet he came not; neither had he left any track, trace, or clue

behind. It was as if he had melted into thin air. There were those who hinted that a flight so sudden, swift, and effectual, must all along have been foreseen as a possible necessity, and provided for. She poured her loftiest scorn on the imputation; she believed him to have been murdered by robbers or secret political agents.

The shock hastened her father's death. In one week she was both a deserted bride and an orphan; free—with almost unlimited wealth at command—to grieve or search, as she chose,—to avenge, if she could. She threw herself into the work of investigation: the police were marvellously ready to assist her, they took her money, and followed out her suggestions; by-and-by, she was amazed to find that her own house and movements enjoyed no inconsiderable share of their attention. It looked as if they suspected that her husband would return to her, and meant to be on the spot! The thought shook her with a sudden terror. It was possible that he had fled—being warned in time to fly, but not to explain—from some secret danger, some dark political vengeance, and that she was only helping to hunt him down!

In this connection, she recalled that casual meeting on the Consulate staircase, and hailed it as a possible clue. She succeeded in finding the traveller, and in forcing from him a reluctant explanation,—reluctant because he had a kind heart, and was unwilling to give pain. His name was Mark Tracey; he had been a class-mate of Edmund Roath, knew him well, and believed him to be the murderer of Alec Arling. He had deemed it his duty, on recognizing him, to inform the Consul who and what he was; and measures were forthwith taken to put him under surveillance. Nevertheless, Roath had made good his escape before the slow Italian officials could be made to comprehend what was wanted, and set about it. For himself, he had done only what he thought right; yet, now that he saw what manner of bride had been so wofully

bereaved, he could almost wish that he had held his peace, and left Roath to the new and better life which he might have led under such fair auspices. Still, he gently added, the holiest influences did not always avail to straighten a warped mind and will, while these often spread around them a fatal infection ;—it were better to—

She stopped him there, thanking him for his sympathy, but rejecting his conclusions. Either the man that he had met was not Edmund Roath, or Edmund Roath was the unhappy victim of a specious train of circumstances. One of these alternatives *must* be true. So she proudly told him ; so she tried to tell herself, turning a deaf ear to every deep, inner voice that ventured to assail or to question her. None the less, she had lost all heart for the search which, it now appeared, she had not so much instituted as joined in. On her part, it was quietly allowed to drop. All the same, news finally reached her that Edmund Roath had died, and was buried, in a small, distant seaport town. Two men had been landed there from a foreign vessel, one an invalid far gone with pneumonia, the other his faithful friend and nurse. The invalid had died in a day or two ; the friend had reared a stone “In memory of Edmund Roath” over his grave, and sailed away in another ship. His name was an unpronounceable foreign one ; as to the invalid’s, they had never heard it until after his death, his friend had always called him by some familiar *sobriquet*.

There was a suggestion in this last bit of history, which Diva was quick to notice. She had the coffin disinterred, and satisfied herself that the body therein contained was not that of the man whom she had married,—albeit, she found on its chill finger a ring which she had given him, and saw that there were some striking similarities of height, complexion, and color of hair and eyes. She needed no further proof that Earle Roy and Edmund Roath were one and the same, and she believed that he still lived, answering to

the dead man's name, and playing his part, on some distant stage. However, she took care that her actions should express quite the contrary conviction; she caused the re-interment to be so arranged as to suggest an intended removal; she generously requited every kindness shown to the invalid; finally, she put on deep widow's weeds, and sickened to feel them so appropriate. She had a sombre intuition that Edmund Roath was dead to her. Nothing remained of him but his backward shadow on her heart and life. The places that had known him grew dim and tomb-like. The wealth which had doubtless been his main object, became worthless in her eyes. The chill materialism with which he had imbued her mind, in place of the more rationalistic creed of her father, made all things ring hollow to her touch. The charm of Italy was gone; its sky had faded, its atmosphere was as heavy with the weight of a dead Past as her own heart. She longed for a new sky above, new earth below, new air to breathe, a new life to live. She longed, too,—poor, empty heart! poor, hungry soul!—for something to love and to reverence, though she was scarcely conscious of it; she knew only that she had a deep thirst which nothing quenched.

To settle herself near her one intimate friend, Coralie Youle; to reassume her maiden name, since she had no right to that of Roy, and only wanted to forget that of Roath; to lead the simple, free, independent life of an artist, without hampering ties, duties, or responsibilities;—this was the shape into which her longing finally crystallized. Art had been her idol when Love came to dethrone it; she had not had time to tire of it, to learn how inevitably it, also, resolves itself into dust, unless breathed upon by a spirit Divine. So she came to Savalla, and was brought into contact with Bergan and his firm, frank Christian faith,—which it was impossible to contemn, being joined to an intellect so strong and fine, and a life so noble. So she found her aunt, and saw how even the Valley of

Shadow was made radiant by the gladness of her Christian hope. Thus her scepticism was at first melted by the sunshine, rather than worsted by force of arms. By and by, however, she dared Bergan to controversy, and found that she had met her master. Not for nothing had he been beaten in many of his battles with Doctor Remy; he had since made it his business to be able to give good reasons for the hope that was in him. He could now make it manifest that Christian Faith had quite as much to say for herself as infidel doubt, and could say it quite as clearly, logically, and cogently. Mind and heart opened, at last, to receive the heavenly guest, under whose fair, white garments, Diva now knew, was sometimes hidden a coat of wrought mail that no sword could pierce, and who, although she had wings to soar beyond the stars, had also feet to plant firmly on the rock of truth.

Finally, she had learned the identity of Edmund Roath and Felix Remy by means of a sketch accidentally discovered in Astra's portfolio; she wondered that she had not suspected it before, seeing how plainly he had left his evil mark on Astra's mind. She was glad to think that she had been instrumental in obliterating it; he himself having helped to fit her for the work. Meanwhile, he had married Astra's friend. What was her duty in this case; to speak, or to be silent? Silence was the pleasanter thing, speech might be the only right thing. Sharp was the conflict, puzzling the controversy. It was not decided until she happened to meet Hubert Arling, and learned in what search he was engaged, and what state of things existed in Berganton. Then, moved by gratitude to Bergan, she had sought Carice.

But what was the meaning of it all? Reared in faithlessness, she had been led to faith. Proud, she had been humbled. Wedded to Edmund Roath, she had been made to follow in his track, and undo, in some degree, his wicked work. So much was plain, even now; the rest would be

read, in time. But oh! the mystery, the wonder, of that overruling Providence, who caught up man's wilful designs, ere they were out of his hands, and turned them to His own vast purposes!

A light footstep fell behind her. Turning, she beheld Carice's soft eyes,—eyes which, she thought half-enviously, showed so plainly that they had never looked upward through the smoked glass of doubt, to divest the sun of his glory, the sky of its blue, and call it seeing more clear.

"We have been talking of you," said Carice, with gentle directness.

Diva smiled faintly. "I thought you would have pleasanter topics," she answered, half-absently, half-sadly.

"Where could we have found them?" asked Carice, earnestly. "Oh, Diva, you will never know—we shall never be able to tell you—what we think of you! But, Bergan says this search after the doctor must be stopped at once."

"He is very kind," replied Diva, quietly; "I understand what he would spare me. Tell him to give himself no disquietude on that head. I dare not lift a finger to stay the feet of justice, if I could; I can bear whatever Providence sends. But my dread is not the expiation of the scaffold, but the finding of no space for repentance. My conviction is strong that—my husband will never be taken alive."

The quick tears came into Carice's sympathetic eyes; but Diva only fixed her sad, calm gaze on the shining river, and saw in it, perhaps, the River of Life, "proceeding out of the throne of God." After victory is peace.

XI.

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

BERGAN now mended rapidly; a mind and heart at ease are excellent medicines. In a few days it was pronounced safe to remove him to Oakstead. Here he was informed of the strange disappearance of Maumer Rue.

"Her grandson, Brick, was at the cabin two or three times," said Mr. Bergan, "when you were too ill to allow his admittance. He is here now, and very anxious to see you. May he come in?"

Brick, being admitted, burst into tears. He was glad to see his beloved master, but his heart and mind were heavily burdened. When he had last seen his grandmother, she had told him that she was going on a long journey, and should not return; but she had charged him solemnly to say nothing of this communication to anybody but Bergan; who, she averred, would return in good time. Then he was to bid him, in her name, to "seek and find;" she had added, that he would know where to look.

Bergan started up with a face of alarm. "I must go at once," he exclaimed; "I am afraid it is already too late!"

"But you are not strong enough," remonstrated Mr. Bergan. "Tell us where to look, we will go in your stead."

"I would gladly do so, if I knew how," answered Bergan, "but I am not certain that I can find the place myself; I never saw it but once, and then it was in the night. At the worst, however, we can cut a way into it. Come, uncle; come, Hubert, you will both be needed; and we

ought to have a doctor, too. The secret—for there is one—has long been kept, but it must needs out now; and it is as well that it should, the day of such things is over.”

The carriage was ordered, and having set down the three gentlemen at the Hall, went after Doctor Gerrish.

Bergan, meanwhile, sought for the hidden spring. It required some time and thought before he found and pressed it. The secret chamber being then exposed to view, Rue was discovered sitting at the massive secretary, in a large arm-chair, with her head bowed on her folded hands. She was dead; Doctor Gerrish affirmed that she had been so for some days. Ample provision of food and water was near; she had died a perfectly natural and peaceful death, from the infirmities of old age. It was apparent that she had deliberately chosen this spot for her death-chamber. But why? That was a mystery.

It was soon solved. As they gently raised the body to lay it on the same bed where her master, and so many of his race had slept their last sleep before her, a folded paper dropped from her clasped hands, and fell at Bergan's feet. He picked it up, glanced at it, and laid it on the desk without a word. There was that in his face, however, which made Hubert also look at it; and straightway he held it up to view with the triumphant exclamation:

“The lost will, gentlemen, the lost will! Bergan, let me be the first to congratulate you.”

It was easy to understand now, that, feeling her last hour at hand, and knowing that no will left anywhere in the Hall, or in her own cabin, would be likely to escape Doctor Remy's destructive touch, she had taken this method of fulfilling her master's last command:

“See that Harry has Bergan Hall. Give this will into his own hands, and no one's else. I trust none of them but you.”

Well might he trust her! Almost a century of loyal service had she given to him and his house, ready at any

time, if need be, to lay down her life for their sake. Well might Bergan give her tender, honorable burial, and cause to be graven deep on her tombstone :

FAITHFUL UNTO DEATH.

Hubert Arling wooed and won Coralie Youle. His strong likeness to his brother first found him favor in her eyes ; by and by, she would have been amazed to be told that she had ever cared for him, except on his own sufficient account.

Diva Thane and Astra Lyte went to Italy, for some years, to give Astra's genius fit food and training. The direction of its future labors was settled. She would spend her life and strength in the service of Christian art, trying to lose all thought of self in that of consecration, and counting her work successful, though it never left her studio, nor brought her either money or fame, if only it lifted the minds of those who contemplated it to a point above itself, to a loftier standard of living, a clearer conception of the beauty of holiness, a more earnest aspiration after the glory that " shall be." On her return, she brought with her a Saint Christopher that satisfied even Carice. The giant was kneeling before the Wondrous Child, who had at once so burdened him, and so strengthened him to bear ; his face was full of awe and love ; he recognized his Lord ; he had found the King who alone was worthy of his service, and whom alone he was content to serve.

As for Diva, there are sisters of charity, who wear no distinctive garments, save patience and faith. A gentleman once said to Bergan, admiring her stately beauty, " She should be a queen." " She is a queen," was the quick reply, " a queen according to the Gospel pattern, ' Whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.' "

In due time, Bergan restored the old Hall, although not

without reducing somewhat of its ostentatious size by cutting down the long wings, and with no extravagant outlay. He had learned that the inevitable, and probably healthful, tendency of property in this country, is to division. The larger and costlier the dwelling, beyond a certain extent, the more sure it is to prove too heavy a burden for some inheritor, and the less likely to go down in a direct line. The man who would have his name live, must link it with some institution more imperishable than a family home. First of all, therefore, Bergan took care to embody in carven stone and jewelled glass that fair vision which he had seen on his first visit to the Berganton church. This being done, we may be sure that his more personal dreams of happiness and honor came true, also.

A fair and gracious wife and mother was Carice ! She never lost the flower-like grace and purity of her girlhood, nor her rare power of seeing straight to the central truth of things. "It is said that I have lost a year of my life," she once remarked ; "it is the year that I count most truly saved."

Richard Causton, having learned, through his forced abstinence during his long, lonely watch over Bergan, that existence was possible without alcoholic stimulant, and being helped by Bergan's steady friendship and countenance, made a determined effort at reformation, and succeeded, though not without a sore struggle, and many lapses. The last of his backslidings was made memorable by the following incident.

Going too near the edge of the excavation aforementioned, he slipped and fell over, displacing some of the sand at the foot of the bank by his weight, which had also been much washed by a recent heavy rain. Struggling to his feet, he was horrified to see a skeleton hand pointing at him from the base of the precipice. He fled, without stopping to look behind him ; but his story set other and acuter minds to work, as well as, a little later, two or three careful spades ;

and the body of Edmund Roath was exhumed, and the mystery of his disappearance was explained. The sand had suddenly caved in, under his weight, and buried him, as he fell. His flight had been short, in one sense; far, very far, in another. Had he witnessed such a termination to another's career, he would, doubtless, have termed it Chance, or Fate; but those who stood around his dead, shrunken body, with its sunken eyes and its uplifted hands, looked awe-stricken in each other's faces, and solemnly whispered, "Providence." Nevertheless, some simple souls murmured that he had escaped just punishment. "Do you think so?" asked Mr. Islay. "So would not he who said 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.' Be thankful, rather, that justice to the guilty is so tempered with mercy to the innocent. An earthly scaffold would not have added one straw's weight to the despair of that miserable soul, when he stood on the brink of death, and knew that his failure was complete for time and eternity, but it would have been a heavy burden to certain gentle hearts. It is they who have escaped, not he. Where the cords of his sins do not hold a man to a godly sorrow, they must needs hold him to a righteous retribution."

Richard Causton's old age had something of the mellow sweetness of a late, frost-bitten apple, such as is occasionally plucked from the tree in midwinter. He lived to teach Bergan's eldest son many of his favorite proverbs, in their many tongues, but he constantly impressed upon him that the truest, most significant, most solemn of them all was one from Holy Writ:

"HE SHALL BE HOLDEN WITH THE CORDS OF HIS SINS."

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